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# PORT ALLINGTON STORIES ·R·E· VERNÉDE

*SHORT STORY*  
*COLLECTION*



*WINWARD PRESCOTT*

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# **PORT ALLINGTON STORIES**

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**R. E. VERNÈDE**



# PORT ALLINGTON STORIES

BY  
R. E. VERNÈDE

NEW  YORK  
GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY



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✓

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## PREFACE

For those people who, before the War, knew my husband's novels and books of travel, and for those who, since his death in action on April 9, 1917, have got to know his name through his "War Poems and other Verses" published in September, 1917, and his "Letters to his Wife" published in November, 1917, I do not think any Preface to this collection of short stories is necessary. But as there may be people who will meet his name for the first time in this book, perhaps a few words of introduction and explanation would be interesting.

Robert Ernest Vernède was born in London in 1875. He was of French Huguenot descent on his father's side and Scotch on his mother's side of the family.

He went to St. Paul's School, won the Milton Prize in 1893, for an original English Poem, and a classical exhibition at St. John's College, Oxford in the following year. He took Greats in 1898.

When he left Oxford he went back to his home in London and took up writing as a profession. He began by writing articles and short stories in various magazines.

We were married in 1902 and came to live in the country in Hertfordshire.

## PREFACE

His first novel "The Pursuits of Mr. Faviel" was published in 1905. He had published four novels and two books of travel before the War began and was beginning to be known and recognized. His first War Poem "England to the Sea" was published in the *Times* of August 7, 1914. In the next few weeks he wrote several more War Poems and later he wrote them whenever he had a chance.

He enlisted as a private in the Universities and Public Schools Brigade of the Royal Fusiliers September 4, 1914, although four years over age. He trained in Upsom for six months and was then advised to take a Commission. He was gazetted 2nd Lieut. in the 5th Bn. The Rifle Brigade on May 14, 1915. He trained in the Isle of Sheppey till November 18, 1915, when he went out to France and was attached to the 3rd Battalion. He was in the Ypres salient the whole of that winter, went down to the Somme in July and was wounded on September 1, 1916, came home for three months. He went out again to the Somme December 29, 1916, but was sent to the 12th Bn. instead of returning to the 3rd. He was killed at Havrincourt Wood on Easter Monday April 9, 1917, leading in an attack on the Woods.

The collection of stories here published he himself had got together and had hoped to bring out. If he had lived he had intended to continue the Port Allington Series and make a complete book of them.

C. H. VERNEDE

The Paper Mill

*Standon, Herts, England.*

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## PORT ALLINGTON STORIES

### “ THIS IS TOMMY ”

**T**HERE is no doubt that Miss Wynches' way of introducing the Hon. Thomas Plantagenet Carr Atford to her friends savoured of that modern spirit which does little or nothing to forward the claims of personal dignity. I question if anybody else would have been able to bring him on the lawn at Garlocks—where there were lots of people gathered and her engagement had been the topic of lively speculation—with quite the same absence of ceremony.

She had spotted the Garlocks motor arriving with him from the station, and she brought him over at once. “ This is Tommy,” she said casually to a group of us, and then tripped off.

The little man at her heels—very high heels they were—trotted forward and said, “ How do ? ” to his hostess in a self-possessed manner.

“ How do you do ? ” said Lady Massenger.

His tiny figure, most carefully dressed, his smoothly-parted hair, the monocle that made an otherwise shrewd face look foolish, caused such

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a combination of unromantic ineffectiveness that even she, who has rather a reputation as a hostess, could only get out so much, followed by—

"We all think you are such a lucky man, Mr. Atford."

"Quite. Pen's great, isn't she?" he said, and his quaint self-possessed manner still further upset Lady Massenger.

"Not at all . . . I mean . . . of course . . . and when is it to be?" she asked.

"Well," he said, first shooting his eyeglass on to his chest,—an action by which, curiously enough, I recognised him as the little Englishman I had once met by chance and climbed with in the Carpathians,—“I asked Pen that the other day myself, and she told me she wouldn't have time to begin thinkin' about it for, a couple of months or more.”

"Of course Pen is always so busy," said Lady Massenger, fancying her sympathy was required. "You'll have to be patient."

"No hurry, no hurry," said Mr. Carr Atford agreeably, and began to talk of things without any g's to them, like shootin' and yachtin'. I thought he did it quite modestly and well, but the general opinion at Garlocks about the matter was that Miss Wynches had for once in a way been too casual.

"I simply don't believe," said Sir George Massenger to some of us who were gossiping about

## “THIS IS TOMMY”

it, “that Pen means to marry the little fellow. I call it a shame.”

“What do you call a shame?” asked Mrs. Adling.

“Misleading him into fancying she’ll have him. ‘This is Tommy.’ What?” Sir George guffawed and became serious again. “Mustn’t joke about one of my own guests, though. Good enough name . . . Carr Atford. Suppose he must have money too. We’re all Socialists now . . . eh? What do you say, Gaydon?”

That rising politician, who had been exercising his wits at Tommy’s expense, acknowledged our host’s humour with a patronising smile.

“You mean Miss Wynches will take him for his money?”

“Oh—you fellows are so literal,” said Sir George. “I’m not going to say that, you know. Don’t want to have you down in the mouth, Gaydon, anyway, by saying she’s going to marry anybody.”

“I confess,” said Gaydon, waiving with another of his smiles Sir George’s allusion to the fact that Miss Wynches had cast her spell over him as well as most people, “that I stick to your first opinion—that she doesn’t mean it. He tickles her fancy.”

“Rather hard on Tommy, isn’t it?” put in Mrs. Adling, who had been knitting her brows over the problem.



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"Good enough for Tommy," said Gaydon, "if he has helped to pass her time."

"Till the appearance of the great right man?" said Mrs. Adling.

I think Gaydon was aware of the not altogether kind innuendo. "Possibly," he said with calm superiority, which in its turn may have prompted Mrs. Adling to say with decision——

"I think she does mean to marry him."

Now Gaydon is a remarkably handsome man, and conscious of that as well as of most of his personal advantages. For the last two days he had been running Miss Wynches for all he was worth—in his opinion, a great deal,—undeterred by the fact of her engagement. Miss Wynches had not seemed to mind. Gaydon himself had much enjoyed it.

And probably the idea of being put on the shelf by Mr. Carr Atford—even though the little man had a right to be first with Miss Wynches—was distasteful to him. Still more distasteful, I take it, was the suggestion conveyed in Mrs. Adling's words that even if he bent the whole of his great personality to the job he would still come out second-best. It was the sort of challenge that upset his self-complacency.

"I can't agree with you," he said. "I think Tommy is an incident. A duchess doesn't marry her Pom, you know."

## “THIS IS TOMMY”

It was a nasty thing to say, and made me break in hastily——

“I must tell you people that I’ve met Carr Atford and found him a very intelligent little man.”

“Ah, but the substitute Mr. Gaydon would like to provide would be a much more intelligent big man,” said Mrs. Adling.

“Thank you,” said Gaydon foolishly.

“I only said—would ‘like.’ It takes two to agree to a substitute.”

“I don’t know what you are talking about,” said Sir George, who had not been listening very attentively, and would not have followed if he had. “Who’s providing a substitute for who?”

“Mr. Gaydon is going to provide a substitute for Mr. Carr Atford—at least he thinks he is.”

“I’m afraid you’re tempting me,” said Gaydon, with a sleek grin.

“Oh no,” said Mrs. Adling. “I’m not tempting you at all. In fact, I should strongly advise you not to try. I don’t think you’ll succeed.”

I knew she disliked Gaydon, but I did not see why her dislike should take the form of pitting him against Miss Wynches’ Tommy.

“It’s not unlike tempting,” I said judicially.

“Poor Tommy!” said Mrs. Adling, not without sarcasm. “But I don’t think Mr. Gaydon is going to be tempted,” she added. Of course she knew that he was, and that was the temptation to her.

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"I wouldn't mind, you know," said Gaydon, all but leering,—“there would be compensations.”

“You'll bet on yourself?” said Mrs. Adling. “Ponies? No, you'd better do it for love—hadn't you? You've taken me, though?”

“With pleasure,” said Gaydon.

### II

The first intimation I had of the progress made by Gaydon came from Tommy himself. I mentioned that we had met in the Carpathians, and Tommy had impressed me by his method of shooting his eyeglass on to his chest. I had last seen him do it preparatory to shinning up a very disagreeable “chimney” which the guides with us had wanted to jib at. So had I. But we had all been persuaded in the end. It was the recalling of this to Tommy's remembrance that had cemented our friendship in a country-house where we were both nobodies, whither Tommy had come, I fancy, only to see his *fiancée*.

We were in the billiard-room alone, and he was beating me rather badly when he broached the topic of Gaydon.

“Do you know him at all?” he asked.

“I know all that's worth knowing,” I said. “He makes a point of everybody doing that. Why?”

“I don't care about him,” said Tommy.

Some people might have said a thing like that

## “THIS IS TOMMY”

pettishly, or in some manner that indicated weakness. Tommy's way was so extraordinarily final that I laughed.

“Extinction of Gaydon!” I said. “But again why?”

Tommy put up his monocle at me, gazed a moment, and shot it down again on to his chest.

“My dear chap, you know as well as I do. He thinks two things—one, that I'm a decadent little worm, and two, that my engagement to Miss Pen Wynches is a mistake. Well, he may be right about the worm part . . . I am a pretty poor specimen—but he's mistaken about the other.”

“Of course he is,” I said.

“But you wonder why I should break out to you about it?” said Tommy, though I had not been aware that my tone conveyed as much. “Well, I don't know. . . . But I suppose being a beastly diplomat in public, I like to gush in private now and then. To a decent chap, you know, who understands.”

“Compliments barred!” I said.

“But you don't mind? No. All right. What I object to, then,” said Tommy, carefully potting the red and leaving his own ball in balk, “is not his private personal opinion of me, though I don't think he need obtrude it quite so obviously, but his cheek in fancying he can tell Pen what she does want. He's making love to her before my nose.”

“We all are,” I said. “Can't help it.”

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Tommy was chalking his cue, and he paused to grin appreciatively.

"You ought to be in the Service," he said. "I couldn't put it more nicely myself. But of course that again isn't what I mean. Everybody likes Pen, but he's the only man here who can see so little in front of his Wellington nose that he thinks she's taking me for money or something of that sort. It's such damned impudence, you know."

"To you?" I said stupidly.

"To her. Just think. I'm an odd little shrimp to look at. Anybody can see that. Everybody does. It is funny to look as insignificant as I do. I used to mind it. But Pen's got such a sense of humour that she doesn't mind much. Well, the fellow's not only telling her he doesn't believe it possible, that it must be the shrimp's money she's after, but he's explaining for the benefit of all and sundry that he knows it from her manner. You know Pen's manner. She doesn't say, 'This is Mr. Carr Atford, the well-known diplomatist, of whom I am unutterably proud.' The fond look of pride doesn't mantle her cheek when she brings me up. No—she says 'This is Tommy,' and leaves me to shift. That's her way—our way. He chooses to think it's proof positive that she thinks me a fourth-rate toy; as good as criticises our way of treating one another because she's not a cook making eyes at a policeman. Fancy me

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making goo-goo eyes back. Rather funny, isn't it?”

Tommy had begun quietly, chalking his cue between whiles, while I made a mild break, and though he had chalked too vigorously he ended quietly too, so that I could venture to say—

“You're not going to punch his head though?”

“Think I could?” said Tommy. “I'm not sure I couldn't, you know. I used to box . . . feather weight . . . but it would hardly do, would it?”

“Hardly.”

“It would make him think I was jealous. That's the difficulty. After all, I don't think it matters.” He perched himself on the table and proceeded to make the winning-shot—then without getting down, and looking very much like a swift that has settled involuntarily and cannot get the necessary impetus for moving, he said, “Pen'll provide, I daresay. My game, isn't it?”

“Yes,” I said, and was about to propose another when Miss Wynches herself tripped into the room followed by Gaydon.

“Finished?” she said. “How nice of you. Mr. Gaydon and I are just wanting a game. I suppose you lost, Tommy, didn't you?”

“He won abominably,” I said.

“How funny. I always think it's funny when Tommy does things well. He does sometimes. Don't you, Tommy? You needn't stop and score

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though. Mr. Gaydon's going to beat me too, badly."

"You know I'm at your mercy," said Gaydon fatuously, and I half expected to see Tommy hit him smartly over the head. But nothing happened except that Miss Wynches said——

"Look out, then. I'll have plain."

### III

Miss Wynches was *petite* herself—being great only in the matter of her eyes and her frocks, and a shrewdness mixed with a superb unconsciousness as to the possibility of her being unwelcome or unfit in any position or society whatever, that was in its way Napoleonic. Her career—from the point of view of parents who had daughters for disposal equally young and far more eligible—was astounding. Everybody proposed to Miss Wynches, and everywhere that Miss Wynches went not one lamb but a score of sheep—some even with coronets—had been in the habit of going. Yet she remained popular.

There were parents at Garlocks who admitted that, and it shows the power Miss Wynches wielded that, even though they must have been delighted at the news of her engagement, they were slow to criticise her for what was becoming a rather obvious fact—namely, that Gaydon was "running her" at an incredibly fast pace, that she seemed quite

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radiant at the arrangement, and that Tommy looked more and more out of it, though still self-possessed.

“I wish she wouldn’t let herself be run,” said Mrs. Adling to me a day or two later, “for really there are some people here who might be excused for fancying that she is not going to show herself the Penelope of legend.”

“You’re not fancying it yourself, are you?” I asked.

“N—no,” said Mrs. Adling with just a touch of anxiety in her voice. “She does appear to be going it, but then she may have some scheme up her sleeve.”

“What sort of scheme?” I said. Needless to say Tommy’s conversation with me had remained purely confidential, so that I was interested to know what a clever woman like Mrs. Adling thought about them—the trio, I mean.

“Oh, I don’t know,” she said. “My idea is—and I shall stick to it from dislike for Mr. Gaydon—that she is proud of Tommy, and dislikes people regarding him casually as they do. She ought for that reason to loathe Mr. Gaydon as much as I do. Perhaps she does. She’s the cunningest creature—all unconsciously, I mean—that you ever saw. But to err is what’s his name, isn’t it? and I don’t like her letting our political guardsman be so obviously gallant. He’s got a low cunning of his own, and even if she squashes him



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at the end of it, he'll make capital out of his temporary conquest."

"Is it a conquest?" I said.

"Well, she seems to be full of him. Always trotting him out. Tells everybody what he's going to do, and what wonderful Bills he's got in his head. They are wonderful as Pen describes them, very zealously, and all mixed."

"I should have thought," I said, "that thereby she was making him seem rather foolish."

"Perhaps," said Mrs. Adling. "But not enough so to counteract the other thing. We're not clever enough here to know exactly how puffed up the man is. Half the people anyhow think Pen thinks him wonderful, and I'm sorry for her Tommy. I think it's an excellent thing that the Great Panjandrum is coming for the week-end. Have you ever met him in private?"

I ought to explain that the Great Panjandrum was the nickname for Lord Elkindale, the then Foreign Secretary.

"No," I said.

"He's a lovely old thing. Nobody ever knows if his tactlessness—which is simply indescribable, you know, and perfectly monstrous for the head of our diplomatic service—is put on or not. In that ability to say things, apparently unconsciously, that nobody would dare to say if they could be charged with doing it of malice aforethought, he's better even than Pen. He's her God-papa, and I hope he'll be awake enough to look after her. I

## “THIS IS TOMMY”

expect she's made him promise to come. He never visits if he can help it. Lady Massenger would just as soon entertain an ogre if it weren't such a triumph to get him over."

"I suppose it's particularly so at present, seeing that he's got the Near East on his hands again."

"Yes," said Mrs. Adling. "I bet it's only for Pen he's coming. Tell me of something intelligent to say in case he talks to me, will you?"

A lion is a lion anywhere, and I think our hostess's excitement, if not her anxiety, at the prospect of the great man's arrival was shared by a good many of the visitors. I think Tommy was the only man I saw who did not begin to wear an air of being a rather profound thinker who could, if called upon, prove to the Foreign Secretary that if he wanted assistance at the helm while the ship of State was plunging, as at present, in rather a heavy sea, he could not do better than apply to him. The ladies had frocks to fall back on with a view to pleasing him in case their intelligence failed, but, as Mrs. Adling put it, since the men haven't that chance of appeal, they have to seem sensible in such a case as this.

As for Sir George, I feel convinced that when he motored to the station to meet his distinguished guest he had some leading points put down on his shirt cuff. Whether he ever used them I never heard, but I expect not, for the rumour spread that Lord Elkindale, though obviously rushed-look-

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ing, was in quite a kindly mood, which he would hardly have been if Sir George had engaged him on the Near Eastern question.

He appeared on the lawn after tea,—a huge man, grey-bearded, but with an occupied frown on his massive brow that did not altogether promise well for those who were to have the pleasure of being introduced to him. Lady Messenger was doing her best, but I know Mrs. Adling came back from a moment's conversation, and sat down beside me with a sigh of relief.

"Well?" I said.

"It's all right—passed!" she said. "Not exactly with honours. I haven't given him any of your tips. But he said he remembered meeting me at the Carters' fifteen years ago. I said, 'Oh yes, when I had my hair down.'"

"I don't believe it," I said.

"I did," said Mrs. Adling, "and he said the details had escaped him, and I said that if he was going to remember all that time back he might remember details. Otherwise it might make me fancy I was getting middle-aged. Whereupon he gave a great grin and said he was sure I should never think that. Now did he mean to be horrid?"

"Nice, of course," I said.

"Oh, there's Mr. Gaydon going to push himself in now," said Mrs. Adling, "and Pen's beckoning on Tommy,—which do you back to get in first?"

## “THIS IS TOMMY”

“Gaydon’ll be first,” I said.

The group of them was standing only a few feet away from where we had our seats, and we could hear Lady Massenger introducing.

“Mr. Gaydon,” she said, and the old man extended his hand in silence, and then looked round in a frowning way as though demanding that some one should explain things to him rather more clearly. Gaydon began to say that he had been looking forward to meeting his lordship, and that it looked like a crisis in the Near East.

“Yes . . . yes,” said the old man, “very kind . . . didn’t catch your name,” and Gaydon paused at the abruptness, and also looked round and saw Miss Wynches.

It was her opportunity and she took it. Nor have I ever seen her look so audaciously unconscious as when she spoke,—“You know Mr. Gaydon, of course, God-pop,” she began. “He’s frightfully rising . . . in your line, I mean politics.”

“Yes, yes,” said Lord Elkindale.

“His head’s simply full of Bills,” proceeded Miss Wynches, “that he’s going to bring in. He’s been telling me about them. I forget what they are, but I know he doesn’t think you’re nearly stiff enough on most points.”

“Really,” said the old man, with a gleam in his eye, as Miss Wynches delivered this statement in her clear ringing voice, “Mr. Grayman——”

“Gaydon,” corrected Miss Wynches.

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"Mr. Gaydon ought to put his views before a constituency."

This to a man who had won a hard-fought seat for Lord Elkindale's party—had spoken a number of times in support of his lordship's policy with such eloquence that an evening paper had marked him for early promotion. Mrs. Adling said that his face was a study. She could see him and I could not. I only heard him say stutteringly that he was in the House already, after which Miss Wynches said most reproachfully—

"Of course he is, God-pop. It's too wicked of you to forget things. I believe I should be very angry if I was Mr. Gaydon."

"Quite—quite," said Lord Elkindale, and then seemed to recollect something,—“He's not the man you're engaged to, is he? Tommy you always call him.”

"Oh, no," said Miss Wynches, and looked round over her shoulder. "This is Tommy."

The tiny man stepped forward, neat and self-possessed. "How do you do, Lord Elkindale," he said, and his lordship suddenly became animated. It was like a volcano that one has thought extinct bursting forth.

"But it's Carr Atford!" he said sharply. "You can't have got over from Vienna since I wired—I only wired three hours ago."

"I've been over a week," said Tommy.

"But—but—it's Providence . . . your being here to-day, and able to tell me what Reftan

## **"THIS IS TOMMY"**

Bey——" Lord Elkindale broke off, and muttered to himself something about "May save a lot." Then he rounded on Miss Wynches. "Why didn't you tell me who your Tommy was? I might have congratulated you if you had."

"Well, you might have guessed I should be particular, God-pop," said Miss Wynches calmly.

"Particular, particular! But you don't know a man with brains when you see him. No woman does."

"Perhaps it's constant association with you," said Miss Wynches amiably, and the Great Panjandrum allowed himself to smile before turning to Tommy again.

"You've not yet told me how you come to be here."

"Why, the fact is," said Tommy, who had for the first time since I knew him almost looked uncomfortable at hearing his praises sounded, "Stretford and I had a small bet about the date of the thing."

"When the insurgents would march?"

"Yes. I said Friday at latest, and Reftan Bey would be round to you this morning. Stretford gave 'em another fortnight."

"You knew better than Stretford," said Lord Elkindale in amazement.

Sir Adrian Stretford was the well-known Ambassador then at Vienna, and what he did not know of the Near East was not considered worth knowing.

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"Well, I'm rather special on Macedonia," said Tommy modestly. "I happened to hear one or two details, which Stretford wouldn't accept, from some of the headmen there, who are friends of mine, and I knew you'd be wanting one of us by the end of the week."

"It was because Tommy was so positive about it," said Miss Wynches, as finely casual as ever, "that I got Lady Massenger to decoy you down. It's much nicer here than in the stuffy old F.O., and you'll both have much clearer brains to talk things over with."

Lord Elkindale's eyes had the gleam in them that I had noticed before, but this time it was apparently a friendly one. "It was very considerate of you, Penelope," he said. "But as a result of it you'll have to say good-bye to Mr. Carr Atford for the next day or two."

"Never mind, God-pop," said Miss Wynches amiably, and Lord Elkindale gleamed again.

"I can't even congratulate you, I'm afraid," he said, "for if we fail, your young man will be the best-hated man in the country. I shall let 'em know that he's running the thing, not I."

"Oh, I daresay Tommy'll pull you through," said Miss Wynches. "Going in?"

"I'm afraid we must," said Lord Elkindale. He turned to his hostess, whom I fancy he only that moment recollected, with a fine old-fashioned courtesy.

## “THIS IS TOMMY”

“I beg you to excuse me for retiring, Lady Messenger, and taking Mr. Carr Atford with me. It is a matter of State importance, which only Mr. Carr Atford can advise me upon.” He bowed and led Tommy off, a mole-hill beside a mountain.

“What a fantigue God-pop seems to be in,” observed Miss Wynches to Lady Messenger.

“Oh yes,” said that lady; “thank goodness Mr. Atford was here. How clever of you to have managed it, Pen. Fancy Mr. Atford advising Lord Elkindale, and being the only man who could do it.”

I think she felt, as indeed we all did, that the apotheosis of Tommy as the saviour, so to speak, of his country was something that demanded our amazement, but she happened to address herself to Gaydon, who was nearest. He was almost to be excused for answering as he did.

“Yes, . . . he manages to hide his light under a bushel, doesn't he?”

Miss Wynches took it with her usual radiant cordiality. “But that is Tommy,” she said. “It's so silly of him, of course. I shall have to break him of it when we're married. And now, while they're talking State secrets, would you like to play me a game of croquet?”

“I think,” I said to Mrs. Adling as she marched Gaydon off,—he couldn't, I take it, refuse,—“I think that last remark is the cruellest I ever heard, if it was intended.”



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"It wasn't," said Mrs. Adling. "That's where Pen's so brilliant. Like her god-parent. He didn't intend anything either."

"When he snubbed Gaydon, you mean? There was no collusion? He didn't do it by request?"

"Of course not. There wasn't time for the request. Besides, Pen wouldn't request."

"Then it was pure absent-mindedness?"

Mrs. Adling smiled reflectively for a moment. "I fancy, you know," she said, "that a man like Lord Elkindale, with his experience of his fellow-creatures, knows bounce when he sees it . . . spots it at once."

"And doesn't mind appearing absent-minded under the circumstances?"

"Exactly."

"It was rather a happy *revanche* for Tommy," I said. "I should like to be sure that it was purely fortuitous."

Mrs. Adling leant back in her chair. "Oh, we can't be," she said; "and I don't say, mind, that Pen mayn't have foreseen it," she smiled again. "Poor Mr. Gaydon! What he must have felt when the great Pan didn't know him! I think he deserved it, though. He was so much too sure of what Pen meant by that phrase of hers."

"You mean——" I began.

"This is Tommy," said Mrs. Adling, mimicking.

## THE GREATNESS OF MR. WATHERSTONE

**A**MONG the ladies who conducted historic salons, husbands would appear to have been an inconspicuous feature. Indeed, one might justly say that these drawing-rooms of history were held almost without regard to their presumably legal owners. They do not seem to have mattered—the husbands. But then history is a queer art. It selects, it glosses, it even—if convenience demands it—forgets. That inconspicuousness of husbands may have been—probably was—their own fault. Equally, however, the radiant ladies who by their wit and their power of attracting thinkers have come down to us in triumph through the centuries may at times have been—in fact were—a little free. In some cases they must have caused the tongue of gossip to wag.

In modern days such a state of things would be painful indeed; nor would Mrs. Watherstone have been anything but shocked at the idea of wanting Mr. Watherstone to be inconspicuous in that sense. Culture in Mrs. Watherstone coincided with virtue. If it had conflicted, she would certainly have deserted culture. There was no need to. She

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was essentially a respecter of the moral laws. Besides, Mr. Watherstone was in many ways unimpeachable. Of his amiability, for example, there could be no doubt; and if at times Mrs. Watherstone found it ridiculous to have as husband a man whom nothing seemed to put out of temper, she did not complain. The sound practical sense which, unvaunted and perhaps even to some extent concealed, underlay her fine intellectuality prevented her from complaining. She recognized that amiability is an asset in the home. Indeed, she had married Mr. Watherstone for this asset. She had never blindly loved him. The absurdly demonstrative passion which he had shown at the time of his wooing she had not at any time reciprocated. If she had ever liked it (and perhaps to begin with she had liked it slightly), it was because passion had made Mr. Watherstone rather more picturesque than he was by nature. On his serene surface it had produced waves. But one gets tired of waves—waves produced by mere passion. To the spiritual eye—and Mrs. Watherstone had a very spiritual eye—passion cannot redeem a man from being commonplace, since it is itself only the commonplace in commotion. If Mrs. Watherstone disliked the commonplace, still more did she dislike commotion.

Mr. Watherstone therefore showed very little of it nowadays. Not for years had his wife seen his equanimity disturbed. His ardour had become a

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simple satisfactory devotion. He beamed where he had burned. Though his pride in his wife was as indubitable as ever, it expressed itself now merely in watchful attentions, in a natural deference, in that pleased smile with which—his stout body balanced on the edge of a Chippendale chair—he would listen to Mrs. Watherstone when, in her salon, she spoke of things æsthetical, metaphysical, mystical, to the circle of her friends.

So far his attitude was harmless enough.

The thing that did irk Mrs. Watherstone—the thing of which she had at times to complain—was that, though he had learned to submit to the quiet influences which made of her (and his) house an intellectual centre of which any man might be proud; though he had learned, in fact, to sit beamingly on the edge of an artistically constructed chair, on the occasion of his wife's at homes, Mr. Watherstone had not learned to assist at them, or to become even in outward semblance a part of them. He sat, he smiled, he listened (or appeared to listen) to the discussions, but he remained somehow aloof—absurdly stout, absurdly affable, absurdly out of drawing. Union with one of the elect had indeed emphasized, rather than softened, the fact that he was a philistine. Even his silence seemed coarse in the midst of such delicate soul-parleyings as went on in Mrs. Watherstone's salon on the first and third Tuesdays. Some of her friends had made tactful efforts from time to time

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to draw him into the charmed circle of their talk. He seemed incapable of being drawn. For example, the Rev. Upton James might invite him to give "a plain man's views" on the appeal made to him by the doctrine of Nirvana. Mr. Watherstone would reply: "Ah, you mustn't ask me. I don't understand it." A modest enough answer perhaps, but one which—considering that Mr. James had explained the Buddhistic theory at some length—was humiliatingly tactless. Surely he could have attempted an opinion. Every one at Mrs. Watherstone's conversaziones did not understand everything, but they all gave their opinions except Mr. Watherstone. They had met to enlarge their minds. As Miss Tindal Atkey once remarked, "It is in the clash of minds that great ideas are born." . . . Mr. Watherstone's mind seemed incapable of clashing—whether the controversy arose over "Spirit photography," "the Place of Superwoman," or (Mrs. Bossington's pet subject), "Is there a Hereafter?" Positively Mr. Watherstone had refused to state whether he would prefer to spend the Æons of the Future as a conscious or an unconscious portion of the World Spirit. He was hopeless.

Mrs. Watherstone often wished that she had from the first discouraged her husband from attending her salon. Like the husbands of the historic salon-holders, he would have been much happier away. Unlike them, he would have been quite harmlessly

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and creditably employed. Conchology was the hobby he had taken up since retiring from an eminently successful business career. Haunting sand-pits and such places, he was in his element. But Mrs. Watherstone never suggested that he should give up coming to her drawing-rooms. For one thing, he so obviously enjoyed watching and listening to her. For another, she was not the sort of woman to hurt her husband's feelings by frankly baring his deficiencies to him, even had she not in a way enjoyed the knowledge that she had in him (foolish as he always looked on the Chippendale chair) an unfailing admirer, whatever her shortage of knowledge might be concerning the particular subject on hand. No other member of the Port Allington Literary and Philosophic Society—as the attendants at her salon were called—had quite so rapt a listener as she. Of course her words went in at one of Mr. Watherstone's ears and out at the other (and now and then, upon reflection, Mrs. Watherstone was not sorry): but the fact of holding some one in thrall for the time being gave her that sense of achievement which is so gratifying to the orator.

It was perhaps this feeling as much as any other which enabled Mrs. Watherstone to bear this affable incubus of a husband. After all, it was only in a passive way that he reflected upon her. He did not demand notice. In moments of high tension he could be overlooked. The profounder the sub-

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ject, the less really one observed Mr. Watherstone. And he was quite content to be forgotten, and active in handing cake and coffee in the intervals of high debate. Then, when commonplaces became bearable, the guests would politely refer to their host, and Mrs. Watherstone would remark, tolerantly, "Don't you think that Mr. Watherstone is getting stouter?" The answer, as well as the fact, was usually in the affirmative, and Mr. Watherstone would beam the more to hear the great minds relax upon him, and be as pleased as a patted dog. . . .

It was the arrival at Port Allington of the Princess Eugénie which for a few bad hours shook Mrs. Watherstone's creed with regard to Mr. Watherstone, and gave Mr. Watherstone the opportunity to re-establish that creed on a basis firmer than ever, and so to exhibit what I have called his greatness. His scientific attainments, whatever they may have been, only enter into the matter in so far as they contributed towards that opportunity.

To begin with, it was on a Tuesday that Mr. Watherstone came to his wife with the Princess's letter.

"My dear," he said, "a lady has just written to me to say she is coming down to Port Allington for a day or two in order to see the Warren and Sandstone Quarry."

"She wants you to show her over, I suppose," said Mrs. Watherstone. People were in the habit

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of calling on Mr. Watherstone to show them the local fauna and flora—as Mrs. Watherstone phrased it. They were usually curiously dressed sort of people, dry of speech and without culture.

“Yes,” replied Mr. Watherstone, and hesitated. “She is putting up at the Métropole,” he added. “I thought perhaps it would be polite if you were to ask her to dinner or something.”

“Who is she?” asked Mrs. Watherstone.

“She’s a member of the C. S.,” said Mr. Watherstone. The C.S. was one of the dull London clubs to which he contributed dull accounts of shells. Mrs. Watherstone smiled her tolerant smile.

“No doubt,” she said. “But who—precisely?”

“Princess Eugénie of Modena,” said Mr. Watherstone.

To some people all royalties are famous, but Mrs. Watherstone had more excuse for instantly recognizing this lady’s name. Now, perhaps, it is less well known. At that time it stood for all that was brilliant, unexpected, fascinating. No doubt her rank counted for something. But she was a princess whom poets praised as well as courtiers; with whom wise men liked to talk because she knew for herself a world that most of those in her position must pass through ignoring—blinded by their own glitter. Mrs. Watherstone might very well be excused her considerable excitement on hearing this name.



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"Princess Eugénie of Modena! Why on earth could you not say so? Of course she must be invited to dinner. I will call on her Highness myself as soon as it is convenient to her. Do you know her? Have you met her before?"

"At the C. S.—yes. She attends meetings pretty regularly."

Mrs. Watherstone expressed surprise.

"But I suppose," she said, "that these great people interest themselves at times in all sorts of fads. No doubt they think it part of their public duty to patronize them."

"Hardly patronizing, is it, my dear?" said Mr. Watherstone, who was apt to be a little obstinate about his hobbies.

"Call it what you like," said Mrs. Watherstone. "But I should hardly think that shells are likely to claim very much of the Princess's attention."

"She's a pretty good conchologist," said Mr. Watherstone, doubtfully.

Mrs. Watherstone was very nearly indignant.

"A pretty good conchologist! Do you know, Mr. Watherstone, that this 'pretty good conchologist,' as you call her, is one of the first of living poetesses, besides being an authority on philosophy and social problems? I should not have supposed that a trifling hobby like yours could have made such a one-sided man of you. I shiver to think what the Princess would say if she could

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hear you. I can see her smile. I do hope you will not bore her with your shells. I suppose she really does want to see these places?"

"Well," said Mr. Watherstone, rendered quite apologetic, "she says she has come down to see them."

"In that case you must do your best for her. I will drive with you to the Métropole and give her a personal invitation to dinner to-night. Luckily, it is my salon night. No doubt she will be interested. It will be a change from shells at any rate."

"I expect she'll come," said Mr. Watherstone. "She is very pleasant."

The Princess was so pleasant—so gracious, as Mrs. Watherstone preferred to call it—that the latter lady was almost overwhelmed. The invitation to dine was accepted at once—one might almost say with eagerness.

"To know that lady who is Mr. Watherstone's wife will be to me a great honor," the Princess said. She spoke so charmingly with her slightly foreign accent that Mrs. Watherstone scarcely noticed the ludicrous assumption that she was, so to speak, nothing but Mr. Watherstone's wife. "You are very kind—not at all." But the Princess would not hear of that.

"No," she insisted. "The kindness is all in Mr. Watherstone consenting to give me his time, personally showing me these wonders of the coun-

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try he has made his own. That I shall never forget."

"Oh, I can assure your Highness," said Mrs. Watherstone, "that Mr. Watherstone is only too pleased. He loves an excuse for dawdling round."

The Princess smiled.

"Now you are sarcastic at me," she said, and while Mrs. Watherstone protested that she would not dream of being so, Mr. Watherstone interrupted by saying that it was time to make a start. The Princess followed him with the smile of a docile child to the carriage she had in waiting (in order, she said, not to waste a moment of his time), while Mrs. Watherstone drove home in hers, wondering if the Princess was, in spite of her delightfully royal and gracious manner, slightly touched in the brain. But at any rate she was coming to dinner. The members of the Port Allington Literary and Philosophic Society must be forewarned in order that no spark of brilliance might be lacking on so great an occasion. A note was despatched to each one of them.

Now, it is possible that Mrs. Watherstone had not realized the Princess's object in coming to Port Allington; or that some instinct of self-defence prompted her to ignore the fact that the Princess had come there in order to avail herself of Mr. Watherstone's guidance—in either case, in her notes to members, Mrs. Watherstone omitted to mention Mr. Watherstone's part in securing the Princess's

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presence. Consequently they arrived at her house in the evening—the ladies somewhat agitated by their efforts to procure suitable creations for such an entertainment at so short a notice, the gentlemen warm with thinking out topics of conversation calculated to impress a royalty—but all filled to overflowing with sympathy for their hostess, so cruelly handicapped as she must feel herself to be with such a guest and such a husband.

“Of course it would never strike Mr. Watherstone to be called away on business,” said Mrs. Bossington to Miss Tindal Atkey, with whom she shared a cab. “Yet it would be the simplest thing to do.”

“Men are ever too selfish,” said Miss Atkey, who was an authority on the sex and could speak with an impartiality impossible to a married woman. “It will not occur to him, and I suppose the poor Princess will have to be taken in by him and bored the whole of dinner-time.”

“If I were Mrs. Watherstone, I should make some other arrangement even at the risk of appearing a little *outrée*,” said Mrs. Bossington.

That idea had occurred to Mrs. Watherstone, but a love of the conventions, which coexisted, as sometimes happens, with a soaring mind, had prevented her from carrying it out. Mr. Watherstone led in the Princess and seated her on his right hand. Mrs. Bossington on his left—with the Rev. Upton James beside her—found herself so

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amazed and overwhelmed by the magic skill with which the Princess set her stout little host talking about all sorts of things which it was impossible he could ever have thought of before—or indeed, as Mrs. Bossington would have supposed, have heard of—that her own previous secret determination to intervene at once and set the conversation on a high plane oozed away, and she heard herself murmuring disjointed answers to the excessively dull remarks of Mr. James, while Mr. Watherstone's beaming smile and dry talk provoked the merry laughter of the Princess.

To Mrs. Bossington and to several other of the literary philosophers the dinner was like a bad dream, from which they only wakened when the drawing-room was reached and they were, so to speak, on their own Parnassian ground, in that rarefied air where no baser mortal can breathe and only the fine spirits are at home. It was while the paper for the night was being read—the subject was “Spiritual Socialism,” and Mr. James was the reader—that the grossness of Mr. Watherstone—seated as usual on the edge of his Chippendale chair—became momentarily more manifest. If one may explain by a simile the effect produced on members by that stout philistine figure beaming on its chair, perhaps the appearance of a bat in a church full of worshippers would serve. Mr. Watherstone did not flutter; he sat tight. But he seemed equally intrusive, uncalled for, disturb-

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ing. Everybody felt relieved when the paper, which was well up to Mr. James's average and in parts extremely mystical, came to an end, and the debate began, and fervid souls rushed into the fray of argument. It was as though the organ had pealed out in our imaginary church and diverted attention from the still visible bat. After a little time the Princess, who had given every evidence of listening fascinated to the paper, was invited to speak on the question. She rose gracefully.

"It has been most interesting to me," she said, in her charming voice, which had, as Mr. James afterwards said, "a royal eloquence" in it. "But on a subject so esoteric I, who have studied little, am fearful to speak. In truth, if I may say so, I am bewildered."

She hesitated, and there was a good deal of applause, Mr. James being particularly gratified. It was her next few words that produced a certain awkwardness. "But that is natural," she went on. "In Mr. Watherstone's house I expected to feel as a child at school. Who would not?"

In the silence that followed, Mr. James had the presence of mind to say, "Hear, hear!" The Princess smiled upon him and continued:

"Being like that child much bewildered, I shall be forgiven if I do not venture on a speech of my own, and I will show myself a wise child, for I will go to the lucid teacher himself and say, 'Please put this into plain words for me.' When

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Mr. Watherstone has spoken I shall be clearer."

A more unfortunate suggestion could hardly have been made, and every one sympathized with Mrs. Watherstone as Mr. Watherstone, conscious that he was the cynosure of every eye and looking more absurdly stout than usual, responded, briefly:

"It's very good of you, ma'am, but I'm afraid it's above my head a bit."

His smile, affable as usual, was more than Mrs. Watherstone could bear; and though it was her habit to ignore Mr. Watherstone as far as possible on these occasions, she could not resist saying, somewhat sharply,

"Any subject which requires philosophic reflection is apt to be above Mr. Watherstone's head."

"Indeed!" said the Princess. She feigned astonishment so politely (though only to see Mr. Watherstone was to realize the force of his wife's remark) that the situation was saved: especially as Miss Atkey helped to smooth things over by stooping to a truism.

"Of course one cannot," she said, "move easily among high thoughts unless one gives of one's best to the labor."

"And has a best to give," added the Princess.

"Exactly," said Miss Atkey.

"And therefore," said the Princess, "I shall feel forgiven if I do not exhibit my stumbling motions before so many great thinkers."

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It was a gracious way of saving an awkward situation, but somehow the debate fell away after this, and the refreshment interval seemed welcome. Nevertheless, it was a disappointment to have missed a speech from so original a thinker as the Princess, and Mrs. Bossington and Miss Atkey, foregathering over lemon ices, discussed Mr. Watherstone—the obvious cause of this *contre-temps*—with no particular good-will.

"He becomes too dreadful," said Miss Atkey. "How Mrs. Watherstone can endure it I cannot think. I am sure she feels it very much."

"Oh, she must," said Mrs. Bossington.

They were fortified in this opinion by quite an unusual snappishness in Mrs. Watherstone's manner, as, coming up to the two a few minutes later with the Princess, and catching sight at the same time of Mr. Watherstone dodging after coffee in the distance, she remarked,

"Really, Mr. Watherstone is becoming stouter than ever, don't you think?"

"But he seems very happy," said Mrs. Bossington, sympathetically, as she glanced over towards the happy man, now busy handing cakes, his serene smile crossing the room as usual to fix itself proudly on his wife.

"Yes," said Mrs. Watherstone, unappeased. "Some people never realize their deficiencies." And she went off hurriedly as if afraid that her



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emotions would overcome her. Mrs. Bossington, to cover her retreat, turned to the Princess. It seemed a good opportunity to apologize—so to speak—on behalf of members for Mr. Watherstone's obtrusiveness. "Poor Mr. Watherstone," she began, "is so very much out of place at our little debates." The Princess, who was eating an ice with a relish and daintiness that fascinated both Mrs. Bossington and Miss Atkey (it was the daintiness that charmed Mrs. Bossington and the relish that fascinated Miss Atkey) did not at once reply. Possibly her mouth was full. Mrs. Bossington continued,

"We are surprised that he bothers to attend so regularly."

"Does he?" said the Princess.

"Invariably," said Mrs. Bossington.

"It is astounding," said the Princess.

Mrs. Bossington was delighted with the great lady's ready appreciation conveyed in such a delightfully ironical way.

"But then, dear Mrs. Watherstone," she explained, "had an idea that he would pick up some of the little pearls that must fall even from mere amateurs like ourselves."

"And he doesn't?" the Princess asked.

"No," said Mrs. Bossington, shaking her head.

"I suppose the fact is that thinkers are born, not made."

"I am sure of it," supplemented Miss Atkey.

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"Mr. Watherstone is most genial, but he could not think if he tried."

"You said?—"

Miss Atkey positively started at the sharpness of the Princess's query. It was so loud, too. Mrs. Watherstone, who had been sought in conversation by Mr. James, turned round at it. So—owing to a lull that happened in the room at the same moment—did several other people. Miss Atkey twittered, uneasily.

"I was saying that the act of thinking is almost impossible to some people."

"So it seems," said the Princess, and her cheeks were suddenly flushed. "But is it possible that Mr. Watherstone is the subject of——"

"Did you address me?"

It was Mr. Watherstone's voice that interrupted the Princess. He must have bounced across the room at the sound of his name, little thinking, as Miss Atkey said later, what they had been saying about him. He wore his most affable smile.

"No, I spoke to this lady," said the Princess. "I was about to say——"

"That you wanted to see my museum! I knew it!" said Mr. Watherstone. "If you will come with me now, I will show it to you."

"Thank you. I think I will first finish what I was about to say," said the Princess, imperiously.

"Oblige me by coming first," said Mr. Watherstone.

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"Mr. Watherstone!" said his wife, horrified, but Mr. Watherstone only went on smiling.

"You wish me to?" said the Princess.

"Yes."

Mrs. Bossington, who had been greatly mystified by the whole affair, confessed that she had expected the Princess to fly into a royal fury. Instead of that she got up and went with him extraordinarily meek—giving one the impression (so Miss Atkey declared) that Mr. Watherstone had exercised some unsuspected gift of hypnotism. Miss Atkey was not altogether sorry, for it had seemed for a moment as though the Princess, with a foreigner's lack of reticence, had been going to discuss Mr. Watherstone to his face—a thing Miss Atkey would have shrunk from. Could Miss Atkey have seen the Princess in the museum, she would have been further puzzled. There was a sort of reproachful humility about her as she said,

"I am not accustomed to be commanded quite so rudely."

"I am sorry," said Mr. Watherstone, but not in the tone of an apologist.

"Is it that you guessed what I was about to say?"

"I had an idea."

"And you did not wish me to say it? You did not wish me to tell these provincials that it was monstrous to hear them speak in such terms of you—of you whose work is known to every savant

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in Europe? Oh—I perceived it from the first—this patronage of imbeciles!” The Princess’s voice rose as though she were addressing them. “But I could not believe it. I asked myself, is it possible that there are such people, among whom you live, who see you every day, who yet believe that their brainless chatter about things they do not understand is above your comprehension? Even if they do not know what knowledge is, have they not heard of your work?”

“My particular work,” said Mr. Watherstone, uncomfortably, “is naturally known chiefly to scientists. Culture is another thing. It is easier perhaps to chat about.”

“Then they do not know of your achievements?”

“Er—no,” said Mr. Watherstone. “Not that there is much to tell them, you know.”

“Not much? Was Darwin, then, of no account? Oh”—the Princess wrung her hands—“why have you stopped me from telling them what I could have told?”

Mr. Watherstone remained uncomfortable.

“One does not want one’s guests’ feelings hurt,” he said.

“But there is Mrs. Watherstone—your wife—she too——”

“I am very proud of my wife,” put in Mr. Watherstone, shortly.

But the Princess was not to be held.

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"She too does not know. She too thinks only that you are——"

"Very stout," said Mr. Watherstone, and beamed once more as though the recollection made him happy. "Madam," he went on, with a dignity that surprised even the Princess, "I think that you are too concerned for my reputation and too little for my feelings. But if you wish to understand—and perhaps it will be best, since you will then not wish to sacrifice me to my greatness—I will explain. When I married, very happily for myself, I was no more than a successful business man. My wife accepted me, knowing me to be no more than that. I have worked since at things more important and had some success. But these things have not happened to be things my wife is interested in. She knows little about them. She has not perhaps a very scientific mind. It is no great loss in a wife. In any case she and these friends of hers, who think most of culture and plume themselves a little on it, have seen me unsympathetic and set me down as dull. It is very natural. I am dull when nonsense is talked, but I am always very happy to sit in the same room as my wife. For that reason and another I would not for anything have her upset in her estimate of me."

"May I ask that other reason?" said the Princess.

"Those who think less," said Mr. Watherstone,  
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"can less afford to reform their opinions. It would only vex her——"

"To know that you were not only stout?"

"Yes," said Mr. Watherstone. "She has been very good to the man she thought only stout. And I love her. . . . Shall we inspect the museum?" he added, a moment later. But this time the Princess was not quite ready.

"One minute, my friend," she said. "I wish to tell you that I will say nothing to them, for you have made me understand. But I will say one thing to you, for I do not think you understand it."

"And what is that?" said Mr. Watherstone, with twinkling eyes.

"That you are greater than any man I have ever met. Yes," said the Princess, as Mr. Watherstone bowed stoutly to the compliment. "And if I could meet another such man, I would not rest content with my present rank."

"No?" said Mr. Watherstone.

"No," said the Princess. "I should ask him to make me a queen. . . ."

When the Princess Eugénie left Port Allington, she had said nothing, as she had promised; and Mr. Watherstone, questioned by his wife as to why he had so rudely carried her off from the salon, apologized profusely. He supposed that his keenness on his museum had blinded him, as usual, to the claims of higher things. The Princess, how-

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ever, he said, had not seemed to mind. Mrs. Watherstone scolded him less than she might have done, because she had—somehow or other—had a horrid presentiment of what the Princess had been going to say to Miss Atkey. Indeed, for several days the possibility of the Princess's Mr. Watherstone being her husband quite oppressed her, and she watched him gloomily for proofs. Finding none, for Mr. Watherstone was the same as he had ever been—affable, placid, silent on soulful matters—she put the idea away. By the time the society met again she had almost persuaded herself that the Princess's Mr. Watherstone had been only a figment of her own imagination, and that the Princess had not thought anything of him, after all. Just for safety's sake she kept her eye on him while Mrs. Bossington read her paper on "Woman Philosophers." There Mr. Watherstone sat on the edge of his Chippendale chair, smiling his absurd smile, a fish out of water, but serenely unconscious of the fact. In the ensuing debate he took no part, pleading contented ignorance. How could the Princess have seen anything in him? The thing was inconceivable, and by the time the refreshment interval arrived all her worries had gone from Mrs. Watherstone. As naturally as though they had never existed, she found herself a little later saying to Mr. James, "Don't you really think Mr. Watherstone is getting too stout?"

## THE OUTRAGE AT PORT ALLINGTON

**T**RANSPORTATION in many of its phases has reached such a pitch of perfection nowadays that we are apt to forget that it has not yet been applied to the class of goods known as ideas. To such places as Port Allington ideas are supplied irregularly. Do not suppose that Port Allington lacks thinkers of its own. Mrs. Watherstone, perhaps its leading resident, Miss Tindal Atkey, Mrs. Bossington, Mr. Mills, and the Rev. Upton James—these, to name no other members of the Port Allington Literary and Philosophical Society, can argue, at one of the society's debates, in a style so subtle and cultured that the simplest subject seems in their mouths capable of making one's head spin; nor, if you want theosophy, free-will, or the psychical self discussed in a refined manner, and one that could not possibly offend the strictest Puritan, need you go further than to one of the society's meetings. Outside these, it is true, the feast of reason flags at times. As Miss Atkey once observed to Mrs. Bossington, we cannot always be feasting. A feast—even of ideas—is a luxury; it may even become a strain. The idea has first to be caught like the hare in



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the cookery book, and—I quote Miss Atkey again —“the common task, the trivial round, absorbs so much of the thinker’s energy.” Miss Atkey herself spent at least half an hour every day polishing her toast-rack—a silver one, the gift of a cousin in India, supposed by one or two of Miss Atkey’s friends to be the nucleus of a romance long dead—if romance is ever dead. Mrs. Watherstone had to see that her numerous servants did not waste their time. Mrs. Bossington spent hours combing Precious, an intelligent but delicate little dog without much hair. Mr. Mills, again, is a banker, and everybody who has a pass-book of his own knows what that means; while the Rev. Upton James, when he is not preparing a backward pupil for some stiff examination, always has his sermons to polish up and put stops into, besides doing a weekly “Things Thought” for the Port Allington *Leader*. I mention these matters merely as examples of how people’s time can be taken up; they do not cover a tithe of the actual work accomplished.

Ideas, then, certainly new ideas (for I ought perhaps to explain that “Things Thought” is mostly a résumé of some of the more familiar reflections of our most familiar writers, with explanations by Mr. James which give them a homely touch) are not imported into Port Allington on quite the same scale as into London, Paris, New York, and such centers, where people have more leisure; and even news filters through in the neces-

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sarily rather scrappy telegrams and articles supplied by a syndicate to the Port Allington *Leader*. They are full of go, these articles, but they rarely, if ever, cover the whole ground, or even make it quite clear what the ground that has to be covered is. The battles in the Balkans, aviation disasters, the Putumayo atrocities—these and kindred subjects are supplied, as it were, without the prologue, the editor preferring to plunge in *medias res*. If, by the way, you find “in medias res” in any column, it is internal evidence enough that Mr. Gipps has written it, though his *noms de plume* are numerous, and include “A Thoughtful Taxpayer,” “Senex,” “One of the Rising Generation,” and so forth. As a result, you get hard facts about appalling battles and bombardments, including the names of the protagonists usually spelled wrong (but what does it matter with these foreign names?) and the numbers of the victims invariably misprinted (but, then, figures are misleading, anyhow, even if you do print them approximately right). Lots of people got quite mixed about the Balkans in Port Allington, though of course they fervently supported the Christian cause; and Mrs. Bossington was at one time constantly making the annoying error—annoying, that is, to Miss Atkey (she never noticed it herself) of supposing that Putumayo was the capital of Albania, or, alternatively, the name of a distinguished Turkish general. Once she even got it into her head that

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Putumayo had won a Marathon race, and after that Miss Atkey insisted on her looking it up on a map at the library; but it was not given, the atlas being vague on the subject of the Americas, and Miss Atkey could only prove to Mrs. Bosington, who was unusually obstinate on the point, that, anyway, it was not the capital of Albania.

It is difficult under these circumstances to follow the history of one's own times with the closeness and impartiality that it demands, and one just has to be thankful that things are no worse than they are, and that civilization is in some way holding its own, though it does not always look like it. Civilization did not look a bit like holding its own when the *Leader*, after practically neglecting the opening phases of the women's suffrage movement, which Mr. Gipps had not thought worth the money the agency wanted for them, plunged one morning into lurid accounts of axes being thrown at England's Prime Minister and bombs being left about in St. Paul's Cathedral, together with detailed bulletins of the state of the hunger-striking leaders' digestions. Miss Atkey, who had, in the prehistoric stages of the movement for woman's emancipation, read a paper temperately supporting it before the Lit. and Phil., instancing, as women capable of exercising the vote beneficially, Sappho, Queen Elizabeth, and Grace Darling, undoubtedly ratted when these later awful examples of what

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a sex war meant appeared in cold print in the *Leader*; and explained at more length than was necessary, perhaps, that she had never said, much less thought, that women as a whole ought to have the vote, but merely that in exceptional cases the right might be accorded to a chosen few with advantage to the state. She was quite testy when Mrs. Bossington, who loved to agree with people, but would take things too much *au pied de la lettre*, wondered doubtfully whether the votes of Sappho, Elizabeth, and Grace Darling would make an appreciable difference at a general election, even if they all happened to live at the same time. And she was very angry indeed with old Mr. Webstone for asking her in the library one morning where she was hiding Christabel, and when she meant to set fire to the Town Hall. Mr. Webstone was so old that you could never be quite sure whether he was silly or only facetious, and to have to answer him softly greatly increased one's wrath. Most of the other Port Allington ladies were in the luckier position of never having read papers on the subject at all, or thought of it, and consequently they could reasonably adopt the position of being strong anti-suffragettes. They would have been even stronger had the question of votes for women ever taken a practical form in Port Allington. It had not done so. It did not seem likely to do so until about a fortnight before the events I have to describe. Then, suddenly and

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crucially, it came before an astonished community in its most dramatic form.

To begin with, Port Allington became aware that it had received in its midst a real live suffragette in the person of young Lumley Moreland's wife. Lumley Moreland was a sort of relation of Mr. Mills, the banker, a second cousin of Mr. Mills having married a Lieutenant Moreland who was in the navy. These naval matches are never very satisfactory, for, as Mrs. Bossington pointed out, even if it is not true, as one hopes it is not, that a sailor has a wife in every port, a sailor's wife certainly has her husband in every port except the one she happens to live in herself, and is practically a grass widow until she is a real one, which in Mr. Mills's cousin's case was quite early in life, her Lieutenant being drowned in the Persian Gulf. Lumley, their only child, was to have followed his father's profession, but was rejected, owing to his eyesight being defective. Mr. Mills then very kindly offered to take him into the bank, with the result that Lumley spent some years in Port Allington, and might—it was generally held—have aspired to the hand of Agatha Mills if he had only shown more application and prudence in banking. Unfortunately he seemed to have the happy-go-lucky spirit of the sailor, in spite of his eyesight. Miss Atkey had more than once condemned (to Mrs. Bossington) the extraordinarily reckless way in which he shoveled sovereigns about with the

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scoop, and nobody was surprised when Mr. Mills and he quarreled. It was rumored that Lumley could not keep accounts correctly, and was constantly making the mistake of causing clients to think they had more to their credit than they had paid in. Naturally Mr. Mills could not tolerate this, but very magnanimously, instead of just dismissing Lumley, he recommended him to a bank in London. Old Mr. Webstone said it was a case of generosity beginning at home and continuing abroad.

Lumley must have shown some capacity in his new sphere, for he was now being sent down to open a branch of his bank in Deeds, the neighboring manufacturing town, which is only a quarter of an hour's railway journey from Port Allington. The fact of his arrival in Port Allington, where he had temporarily got rooms, of his new position, and of his recent marriage to a suffragette who had actually been in prison, were soon the staple subjects of conversation. Miss Atkey called on Mrs. Watherstone the day after she heard them, to learn what Mrs. Watherstone intended in regard to calling on Mrs. Lumley. In matters of this sort, the final decision usually rested with Mrs. Watherstone, and even Miss Atkey, with all her individuality and strength of character, deferred to her. Mrs. Watherstone announced that she intended to call.

"My husband has asked me to," she explained. "It appears there is nothing against the girl except

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in a political sense. She is a lady—the daughter of a well-known barrister.”

“Really,” said Miss Atkey.

“Yes,” said Mrs. Watherstone. “I have promised to call. I expect the Millses will do the same. It will look a little like business jealousy if they do not.”

“Oh, of course the Millses will follow your example,” Miss Atkey assured her. “Mrs. Bossington and I had practically decided that it would be the right thing to call, and I am so glad to know you agree. After all, her opinions are her own.”

“And can be ignored,” said Mrs. Watherstone, with her calm air of *grande dame*.

“Quite so,” said Miss Atkey, and went home relieved. It would have been uncharitable—and a little dull—not to have called on Mrs. Lumley Moreland. As it happened, they were able to get one of Wheeler’s victorias for the very next day, which was lucky, for, as Miss Atkey remarked to Mrs. Bossington on the drive up, if you meant to do a kind thing to a new-comer, the sooner you did it the more it would be appreciated.

“And it’s so nice, too,” Mrs. Bossington agreed, “to be able to say one has seen her already. People are certain to be curious about her, and we shall be quite first in the field.”

“That aspect of our visit had not struck me,” said Miss Atkey, crushingly; “nor, if I had thought

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of it, should I have asked you to come with me so early. Perhaps we had better turn back."

"My dear!" said Mrs. Bossington, horrified. "We can't do that. What will Wheeler's man think?"

"I should not dream of allowing the opinion of Wheeler's man to influence me," said Miss Atkey.

"But we shall have to pay him, in any case," Mrs. Bossington reminded her quickly. "Besides, we ought to find out what she's going to be like, don't you think?"

Miss Atkey, who had bent forward as though to give an order to the stolid figure of Wheeler's man, who was never supposed to hear the conversation that went on two feet away from him, sat back stiffly.

"We will go on if you like," she said, "but please remember that we are merely paying a call. I propose to ignore her on her militant side and I hope you will do the same."

"Oh, certainly," said Mrs. Bossington.

Her submissiveness was invalidated by reason of the fact that Mrs. Lumley herself broached the subject within three minutes of their arrival. She was a slight girl with a keen, intelligent face, and a way of serpentine her body about that showed, no doubt, a restless spirit. It seemed to Mrs. Bossington's fascinated eye that she did not wear corsets, and she would have liked to make sure by



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asking her, if Miss Atkey had not been present. To Miss Atkey's modesty such conversation would have been terrible: the spirit, not the flesh, for Miss Atkey, whose stiffness was upset almost as badly as if corsets had been mentioned when Mrs. Lumley, who had answered some questions about herself and received some information about Port Allington in quite a normal way, asked, abruptly, "You're one of the few people with us in this place, aren't you, Miss Atkey?"

The form of the question rather annoyed Miss Atkey, who was accustomed to be slightly in advance of people, rather than with them.

"In what respect?" she inquired with dignity.

"The militant movement."

"Most decidedly not," said Miss Atkey, indignantly.

"What a pity!" said Mrs. Lumley. "I quite thought you were. Lumley told me of some paper that you read to that old society—what's its name?—in which you took up quite the advanced position."

"If Mr. Moreland was thinking of the paper that I read before the Literary and Philosophical Society," said Miss Atkey, incensed by the compassion in Mrs. Lumley's tone, "I am afraid it shows that he did not understand it."

"But he assured me that you were for the vote," insisted Mrs. Lumley. "There was something about Sappho and Grace Darling."

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"Er—not at all," said Miss Atkey. "I'm against the vote."

"She read the paper," explained Mrs. Bossington, loyally coming to her friend's rescue, "before the movement really began and before we'd properly thought about it."

"Oh, I see," said Mrs. Lumley, drily, and Miss Atkey rose and held out her hand.

"I read the paper," she said, icily, "before the movement developed into a series of criminal imbecilities. I must beg your pardon if I am hurting your feelings, for I believe you are——"

"Oh yes, I'm one of the imbeciles," said Mrs. Lumley, quite peaceably. "I've even been in prison for breaking windows. I've given it up since I married. It doesn't help my husband in his business. We're an inconsistent sex, aren't we?" She spoke rather dreamily, and Miss Atkey, who prided herself on her consistency, did not reply.

Mrs. Bossington seized the opportunity, as Mrs. Lumley showed them out, to ask, "Were you forcibly fed?"

It was not mere inquisitiveness on her part. Sometimes for days together Precious would not take his food, and she had vaguely wondered if a tube would be helpful.

"Yes," said Mrs. Lumley, with brevity. "I didn't like it." They were at the hall door now, and she went on: "It all seems so wrong and

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stupid, doesn't it? It makes one wonder if it is a nice world we live in."

"When you have lived in Port Allington for a little you will come to less morbid conclusions," said Miss Atkey with pardonable patriotism, and on the way she explained to Mrs. Bossington that she felt very doubtful whether it would be right to vote for Mrs. Lumley as a member of the Literary and Philosophical Society, supposing the question came up. Mrs. Bossington said she thought she liked Mrs. Lumley, and, anyway, she was very glad they had called. She had never met any one who had been in prison before, and it was so interesting. Privately she decided to consult Mrs. Lumley about the possibility of forcibly feeding Precious.

It was about a week later that the first outrage in Port Allington occurred, and you may imagine the excitement when the *Leader* came out with large handbills:

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#### *Attempt to Destroy H. M.'s Mails Militant Suffragette Suspected*

Copies of the *Leader* sold like hot cakes, and it may be said that the dramatic account of the outrage, written by Mr. Gipps's own pen, was read in every home that night. It appeared that the pillar box in General Gordon Street—in other words, the box nearest to where both Mrs. Bossing-

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ton and Miss Atkey lived—had had some dark liquid of mysterious composition poured into it by a hand or hands unknown. As a result a large number of letters were smeared and stained, and in some cases rendered undecipherable, while the bag of Crossley, the postman, was almost stuck together, and it took him hours—so he assured a representative of the *Leader* in an interview—to get the stuff off his hands and trousers. Mr. Gipps, like a good journalist, made the most of these facts. He warned readers to be careful how they handled their letters during the next few weeks—expressed a belief that though the chemicals used were of a corroding nature as far as stationery was concerned, they were not necessarily dangerous to human life, exhorted the police to keep a sharp lookout in the neighborhood of General Gordon Street, and ended with an earnestly expressed hope—not too hopefully worded—that no similar excesses would again stain the fair name of Port Allington. No reasons were adduced for supposing the outrage to be the work of suffragettes, but at the same time everybody knew that a militant in the person of Mrs. Lumley had come to live in Port Allington. Facts are facts, and you can only piece them together.

It is perhaps needless to say that after the publication of Mr. Gipps's article Mrs. Lumley was to Port Allington much as a tiger is to the Indian villagers in whose neighborhood it has taken up

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its residence—a cause at once of the deepest terror and the most stimulating gossip. Her chances for election to the Lit. and Phil. were, in Miss Atkey's opinion, but small, for a member of that society had to be, like Cæsar's wife, above suspicion. She happened to express this opinion, by no means for the first time, to Mrs. Bossington, one afternoon about five days after the outrage had been committed, and Mrs. Bossington, in one of her obstinate moods, had said she did not see why Mrs. Lumley should be suspected.

"I see no more reason to suspect her," said Mrs. Bossington, "than—than—to suspect you."

"Thank you," said Miss Atkey, coldly, and allowed Mrs. Bossington to depart rather earlier than was usual when they sat together over a cup of tea. Miss Atkey was not altogether sorry for this, partly because she disliked to be contradicted in her own house, or indeed in anybody else's, partly because she wanted to pack and post a little woolen cap that she had just knitted for a cousin's child recently born. She set about this as soon as Mrs. Bossington had left, and finding that the cap, rolled up neatly in brown paper in the form of a sausage, looked as if it could, with a little squeezing, be got into the pillar box instead of having to be sent to the post-office, she presently started out to post it in the box with her own hands.

As she went she passed the new constable, a

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big, surly man who had lately, much to her own and Mrs. Bossington's regret, superseded Giles, a smiling, cheerful policeman who, if he could do a service to one of the residents, was always ready to do so. Mrs. Bossington had said of Giles that when he was on his beat it was almost as good as keeping one's own footman, for you could rely upon him to hold open the door of a cab, carry in a box, post a letter, or do any little thing that he could to be obliging. If it had been Giles Miss Atkey passed, she would have handed him the parcel to post; but not fancying the looks of this new man, she went on with it herself. She had forgotten all about him in her efforts to squeeze the cap into the letter-box, when, on turning round on the completion of her task, she looked up to find him standing close beside her. Her astonishment may be imagined when she heard him say as she turned to go back,

"You'll wait 'ere a moment, please."

"What did you say?" said Miss Atkey, uncomprehendingly, taking a step forward as she spoke.

The man instantly interposed his burly form between her and the way she wished to go, and repeated, "You'll 'ave to wait 'ere a minute."

"What for?" demanded Miss Atkey, sharply. "I hardly think you understand what you are saying, constable. Do you know who I am?"

"No," said the big man, rudely, "but I 'ave my suspicions. We'll see in a minute if I'm right or

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not. If I'm right you'll 'ave to come along of me to the station on suspicion of trying to destroy this 'ere pillar box with chemicals."

"How dare you suggest such a thing?" demanded Miss Atkey, shrilly. She had meant to be quite cool, but as a matter of fact hot shivers, mingled with indignation and fear, were beginning to cause a loss of self-control. Never in her life had she conceived the possibility of her coming into opposition with the law or its guardians, and the suddenness and indignity of the thing appalled her. Suppose she were marched to the police station!

"I have only been posting a little parcel," she went on. It contained a child's cap. If you will open the box you will see it on top of the other things."

"Just what I'm a-goin' to do," said the huge man, menacingly, "'Ere is the postman—I was expecting 'im. 'Ere, Jim," he added, as the postman came up, "be careful 'ow you opens that box. Unless I'm mistook, there's been another attempt on it, by this 'ere party."

"You don't never say so!" said the postman. He was a young man whom Miss Atkey did not recognize—a young man with a large mouth and a fatuous grin, who seemed to find something funny in the situation in which Miss Atkey stood. She watched with a sick presentiment as he stooped to unlock the box; her limbs shook under her as he drew out a handful of letters smeared with some

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black substance, and said with a loud guffaw, "'Ere's a go. She've done it sure enough. I never see such a mess. Why, there must 'ave been a pint of it."

"It has nothing to do with me," said Miss Atkey in a quavering voice. "I am innocent."

"Yes, we've 'eard that before," said the policeman, heavily. He laid an enormous hand on Miss Atkey's shoulder as he spoke, and added, "You'll 'ave to come along o' me to the station. And I warn you that anything that you say 'll be used as evidence against you."

Miss Atkey never afterward could explain satisfactorily to herself what happened next, but it must be assumed that a panic seized her. Courageous in all intellectual situations, she had never before found herself, or even pictured herself, in a position of actual peril. Now in a moment she saw herself haled shamefully to jail, lodged in a cell, placed between wardresses in a dock, condemned perhaps to penal servitude, and in that moment her one instinct was to escape before all these dreadful things happened. Without reasoning, without being able to reason, she suddenly slid from under the policeman's hand and ran like a hare down General Gordon Street.

She ran for a minute that was a lifetime, with strange things dancing before her eyes and strange noises buzzing in her ears, and she came to a stop in the arms of Mrs. Lumley Moreland. She knew that, because she could hear Mrs. Lumley More-



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land saying, "How dare you?" to the big policeman. She also knew that, strangely enough, Mrs. Bossington was there, for after a couple of minutes Mrs. Lumley transferred her to Mrs. Bossington's arms, in which she must have fainted. The actual course of events she only heard half an hour later when she had recovered in her own house with Mrs. Bossington applying eau de Cologne to her temples and talking volubly the while. It appeared then that Mrs. Lumley had saved her from the dock. Mrs. Bossington was too excited to explain the matter clearly to a person in her friend's condition, but it appeared that, with Precious in her mind she had gone to see Mrs. Lumley again, and that lady, though discouraging the idea of a tube, had announced herself an expert in the diseases of dogs and had offered to go back with Mrs. Bossington and give an opinion about Precious. They were on their way when Miss Atkey dashed into them.

"I was so horrified myself with that brute," said Mrs. Bossington, "that I could do nothing but threaten him with my umbrella, and I expect if I had been by myself I should not have been able to keep him off for long. Mrs. Lumley was absolutely calm. She seemed to know exactly what to say, and the man was cowed at once, and apologized to me on your behalf most humbly. I said that it was the most outrageous thing I had ever heard of, and that you would probably insist upon having

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him dismissed from the force. Then, very luckily, Pratts passed with one of Wheeler's cabs, and after we had got you into it, Mrs. Lumley went off with that dreadful man."

"What for?" inquired Miss Atkey.

"My dear," explained Mrs. Bossington, "she confessed to putting that stuff in the box! I don't know when she did it, and for a moment I wasn't sure whether she hadn't said it just to take that dreadful brute away from you. But she mentioned being in Holloway, and he seemed to have no doubt that he had got hold of the right person."

"He seemed to have no doubt about that with me," said Miss Atkey, sitting up. "If you think there is the smallest doubt about it," she went on, earnestly, "we ought to do something at once."

"What?" said Mrs. Bossington.

"Inform some responsible person," said Miss Atkey. "Lumley ought to know."

"But he won't be back from Deeds yet," objected Mrs. Bossington.

"Mr. Watherstone, then, or"—Miss Atkey's voice faltered slightly, for she was still shaken by her adventure—"Mr. Webstone. He is nearer. I do not think that he would be—be—irresponsible in an emergency."

"I thought of him," said Mrs. Bossington, "if you wouldn't mind, Priscilla. I do not think he would laugh. He can be a perfect gentleman."

"It is my duty not to mind," said Miss Atkey,

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stiffly. "And in any case there is nothing to laugh at. That policeman is a disgrace to Port Allington, and I shall not rest until his conduct has been exposed."

She resisted Mrs. Bossington's entreaties to her to rest, and almost ran that lady, whose championship of her friend had greatly exhausted her, to Mr. Webstone's house. Luckily they found him in, and, as Mrs. Bossington had expected, extremely chivalrous when the serious nature of the case was laid before him.

"Quite intolerable of the constable," he said to Mrs. Bossington. "I only wish you'd broken your umbrella on the man's back. I can't think how he can have suspected Miss Atkey of militancy. It's not even as if he were a member of the Lit. and Phil."

"I——" began Miss Atkey.

"Quite so, quite so," said Mr. Webstone. "You say that Mrs. Lumley has confessed to the charge but you don't believe that she did it? Nor do I. I'll send a message round to the inspector at once. You ladies must drink a glass of port wine while I write it. Then we'll go round and interview the real authors of the outrage."

"Do you know them?" asked Mrs. Bossington, amazed.

"I have an idea that I do," replied Mr. Webstone.

He was amazingly quick for an elderly gentleman. The ladies had barely finished sipping their

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port wine before his letter to the inspector was done and a carriage that he had mysteriously ordered was at the door. Into it he handed Mrs. Bossington and Miss Atkey, and then ordered the driver to take them to an address in the poorer part of the town. They drew up before a cottage in the front window of which was placed a placard bearing the words, "James Tripp. Chimney sweep."

"Good evening, Mrs. Tripp," he said to the woman who came out in reply to a knock on the door. "I want to see Jimmy and Jos, please, if you'll ask them to step out for a minute."

"They ain't barely back from school and havin' their teas. I'll call 'em," said the woman. She went into the cottage and returned in a moment with two small boys of about the age of eight and ten. They had that weak appearance about the legs which tight knickerbockers give, and large heads covered with tow-colored hair.

The moment they perceived that Mr. Webstone, whom they evidently knew in a friendlier guise, wore a face of severity, they looked uneasy and shuffled with their feet. Mrs. Tripp, who evidently knew the symptoms, said, as she marshaled them in front of the carriage door, "I hope they haven't done nothing wrong?"

Instead of replying, Mr. Webstone suddenly stretched an accusing fore-finger between the pair. "Now then," he said, "which of you two put that stuff in the letter-box?"

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The reply was instant, if contradictory. "Jos did," said the larger boy without compunction.

"No, I didn't," said the younger one. "Jimmy did it hisself. I couldn't reach to it."

"Ha!" exclaimed Mr. Webstone, "so Jos is a fibber and Jimmy's a sneak. D'you think I don't know about it? You mixed the stuff together, you amazing ruffians. Then Jimmy held Jos up while Jos dropped it in."

"Jimmy 'e mixed more than what I did," pleaded Jos.

"Well, I never!" groaned Mrs. Tripp. "I couldn't have believed it of them."

"That's because you never were a boy," explained Mr. Webstone. "I was. Boys 'll do anything—except hunger strike." He turned to the culprits again, of whom Jos was now blubbering and Jimmy had his fists ready to affix to his eyes as soon as they felt wet. "What did you do it for?" he demanded.

The motive was supplied by Jimmy, not without sniffles. "Teacher she told us in school as there was ladies what put in a black linquid in the letter-boxes in London."

"That's the modern idea of keeping children up to date with the current events," commented Mr. Webstone. "Didn't she tell you it was very wrong?"

"She said as it was very sad," distinguished Jimmy, "but it showed us p'r'aps women was

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braver than men, though men did think such a lot of themselves."

"There you are," said Mr. Webstone—"the spread of sex antagonism. Teacher's evidently got it badly. What next, Jimmy?"

"When we come out of school," said Jimmy, sniffing, "Lisa Swan said as she was braver than what I was, 'cause she was a woman, and no boy ud dare put black linquid into a letter-box—"

"That'll do," said Mr. Webstone, and he turned to Mrs. Tripp. "Kindly tell your husband," he said, "that I want all my chimneys swept on Thursday, but I shall give the job to Driver if he hasn't given both those boys a good whipping by then. They're very bad boys. They're more desperate than girls. They'll end by being forcibly fed on bread and water. Jimmy's to get three extra whacks for being a sneak, and Jos two for telling fibs. Good night, Mrs. Tripp. Home," he added, to the coachman.

They were some way on the return journey before Mrs. Bossington had sufficiently recovered from her astonishment at this display of detective prowess on the part of Mr. Webstone to ask him how he did it.

"I know everything that goes on in Port Allington," replied Mr. Webstone, twinkling. "It comes of leading an idle life. All the best detectives are idlers. In this particular case I happened to be looking out of my window at the time the first

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outrage was committed. Of course I didn't know what they were up to at the moment, but as soon as I heard that some black chemical had been put in I put two and two together. I remembered Jimmy and Jos took a good long time posting whatever it was. I knew that they were the sons of Tripp. I knew what a fine mixture you can make out of soot and water. Why, I remember turning my own sister into a regular brunette with it when I was Jimmy's age."

"Why didn't you elucidate the matter before?" asked Miss Atkey.

"It didn't seem fair to Gipps," said Mr. Webstone. "He had written a fine, stirring article on the situation, and it wouldn't have been right to spoil it. Besides, it would have been a feather in the caps of the suffragettes—what? We can't encourage these revolutionaries at Port Allington."

"But why did Mrs. Lumley—" began Mrs. Bossington.

"Just neighborliness, I suppose," said Mr. Webstone. "She's not afraid of policemen, you see, and thought she could do Miss Atkey, here, a good turn. My own opinion is that even anarchists have their good points. Personally I like Mrs. Lumley. I think she's an addition to Port Allington."

"So do I!" said Mrs. Bossington, enthusiastically. "I could almost be a militant myself when I think of her noble behavior."

"I shall leave the town if you do," said Mr.

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Webstone. "It would not be safe. No, you must get Miss Atkey to lend you that anti-suffragette essay of hers, to counteract the effect of Mrs. Lumley."

"I'm not at all sure," said Mrs. Bossington, "that Priscilla won't feel quite militant herself after the way that policeman treated her."

"No," said Miss Atkey, severely. "I shall always feel grateful to Mrs. Lumley, but I hope that I shall never confuse principles with practice."

There were two or three sequels to Miss Atkey's adventure. The heavy policeman received a wiggling and was made to offer an apology to Miss Atkey, which she received with unparalleled dignity. He is now nearly as polite as Giles. The young postman did not get a Christmas box. Mr. Gipps, who had already sent to press a further article dealing with the second outrage on the strength of an interview with the postman, had to retract some very hard sayings about the militants in his next issue, and confess himself wrong. But confessing oneself wrong never comes hard to the born journalist, who is a lover of truth in all its aspects, both earlier and later. And, finally, Mrs. Lumley, proposed by Miss Tindal Atkey, and seconded by Mrs. Bossington, was unanimously elected a member of the Literary and Philosophical Society. But none of these things can be taken to prove that outrages further the cause of progress.



## THE OFFENSE OF STEPHEN DANESFORD

**N**OTHING new, we are told, can be achieved without a struggle, and certainly the Literary and Philosophic Society of Port Allington was a good deal divided in spirit by the proposal that public lecturers should be invited down to speak before it.

Hitherto the custom had been to have papers read by members; visitors, if there happened to be any, only being asked to join in the debates. It was felt that the innovation might be a considerable one.

There were certain things to be said in its favor. One was that it was proposed by Miss Phyllis Watherstone, who had come to live in Port Allington with her aunt, Mrs. Watherstone, who in turn—and this was the chief thing to be considered—was President of the Society. All the meetings were held in Mrs. Watherstone's house. Phyllis used to speak of the house as her uncle's, but owing to Mr. Watherstone's lack of culture the place in which Literary and Philosophic Port Allington met was usually spoken of as Mrs. Watherstone's. That seemed more fitting.

However this might be, since Phyllis had pro-  
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posed the motion, Mrs. Watherstone presumably favored it, and members felt that the lady who provided the salon and the refreshments ought to have some say in the matter.

Moreover, as Phyllis pointed out, all members were not as ready with papers as was desirable, and this led to certain other members—such as their energetic treasurer, Miss Tindal Atkey, and their vice-president, the Rev. Upton James—being called upon to do more than their fair share of work. Not, said Phyllis, that these keen philosophers ever failed them. Miss Atkey, she believed, had read four papers in the course of the summer. The Society could not be grateful enough to her. Still, that sort of thing was bound to prove a burden in the end; and outside lecturers would lighten it.

This was all well and tactfully put, and the Rev. Upton James acknowledged as much in his opposition speech. Miss Phyllis, he declared, had made a very graceful allusion to the work done by certain older members. Speaking for himself, he would always be glad to do what he could in the way of reading papers to the Society. It was a task, of course, but personally he did not grudge it if it kept the Society a little private, a little cloistered from the outside world. Some people fancied, perhaps, that this would make them narrow, but they were wrong. Port Allington was not afraid to *think*. He would remind members

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that they had taken all literatures and philosophy for their province. It was a province without limits or boundaries in one sense, and yet in another sense there were limits. They were unchartered, but all members recognized them, and would continue to do so if they kept the Society to themselves. Outsiders might not so easily know when and where to stop. To take a single example, public lecturers sometimes touched on theological matters in a way that was not always nice.

There was a good deal of clapping when Mr. James sat down, and still more when Miss Tindal Atkey rose. Miss Atkey supported Mr. James. She said that she too was ready to read as many papers as the Society desired. She agreed with Mr. James that there was little or no chance of their becoming narrow in their views. For her part she was prepared to pursue Truth to its uttermost bourne, but she could not see how lecturers would assist the Society. In her opinion they should adopt as their motto the lines of that great poet, Sir Lewis Morris:

"Alone, and yet daring  
Our Infinite Fate."

The trouble with strange lecturers was that you never quite knew what you might be going to hear.

Phyllis, sitting next her uncle—a stout little man who always occupied the same Chippendale

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## OFFENSE OF STEPHEN DANESFORD

chair and looked terribly Philistine in his wife's salon—smiled at this peroration of Miss Atkey's, but other members were impressed by it. Luckily—from Phyllis' point of view—and most unexpectedly, Mrs. Bossington supported the proposal. She was an old and very weighty member of the Society; and Miss Atkey and she, though they were the best of friends, occasionally crossed swords. As a rule she was less daring in her views than Miss Atkey, who sometimes frightened her. On the other hand, she was in social matters bolder. She liked the company of new people, from whom Miss Atkey shrank. She approved of men, whom Miss Atkey denounced. There are, of course, all kinds of courage; Mrs. Bossington's was perhaps of a sluggish nature. She contended that if proper precautions were taken, the risks that Miss Atkey and Mr. James feared could be minimized. It was not as if they were all very young people liable to be carried off their heads by revolutionary doctrines. No doubt some lecturers were socialists and anarchists, but dear Mrs. Watherstone and the committee would not ask them to Port Allington. She would suggest trying to get a lecturer to give a course on Dante. The Middle Ages, she believed—and perhaps the Rev. Upton James would correct her if she were wrong—were usually safe in a moral sense. Dante was a Christian poet, though in many ways medieval in his ideas. Again, he wrote in Italian, which in her young day was considered

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an essential language for young ladies to learn. It was liquid and musical; and though, alas! she had forgotten most of it, she thought that she would soon be able to pick it up from Dante.

Mrs. Bossington's speech carried the day, and it was decided by a majority to have the lecturers. Mrs. Watherstone said that she would always be happy to put them up for the night if that were necessary; and it only remained for the committee to fix on the courses. Dante seemed to offer so many advantages that he was agreed upon unanimously. Ruskin hung in the balance for some time, because Miss Atkey had heard a canon of St. Paul's say that his later economic views were unsound. Browning also was objected to by some members on the ground that when poets are obscure, lecturers are apt to make them a jumping-board of their own possibly anarchistic theories. Mr. James, however, contended that Browning was a capital mental drill, and Miss Atkey said that *Sordello* had always fascinated her. The confession gave Phyllis the idea for a picture in which the poet should be represented as a large serpent mesmerizing a small rabbit-like Miss Atkey with big *Sordello* eyes. But Browning was finally carried. Christian Science fell through. It was regarded as Miss Atkey's especial province, and though she herself said that she would be very pleased to hear what a public lecturer had to say on the subject, members felt that to have such a

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course would be like bringing coals to Newcastle.

It was less easy to fix on the philosophy courses than it was to determine the literature ones. Few members could for the moment recall the names of the philosophers they were interested in, and though Miss Atkey had a list of her favorites in a book, the book happened to be at home, and Miss Atkey rather fancied that she had packed it away for the summer. Mrs. Bossington's suggestion, therefore, that they should try and get a lecturer who would familiarize them with the latest views in the philosophic world was welcomed, and it was decided to begin the new order of things with a lecture on Modern Philosophy.

To Mr. James was assigned the task of engaging lecturers; and his despatch may be gathered from the fact that within a week from the Society's decision notices came round to members saying that at the next meeting of the Society, which would be held as usual at their President's house, on June 2d, Mr. Stephen Danesford would lecture on the "Trend of Modern Philosophy."

Who was Mr. Stephen Danesford? That was the question which during the intervening days interested all keen members. Mr. James would only commit himself to the statement that he was "one of our thinkers," and that he wrote for the leading reviews. Efforts to obtain his photograph from the metropolis were made by several lady members, but without success. Nor could they, as Mrs.

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Bossington pointed out, write to one of the home journals asking for a brief account of him. If he heard of it, it would seem so insulting. And it was not like wanting to know the best way of taking ink stains out of the sofa. The result was that the lecturer's personality remained unknown in Port Allington, till a first intimation of it was brought to Mrs. Bossington by Miss Tindal Atkey.

Miss Atkey arrived almost breathless, and the gleam behind her spectacles showed that she was greatly moved. "I have seen him, my dear Mrs. Bossington," she said, as she sank into a chair.

"Mr. Danesford—?"

"Yes. He is too dreadful. I don't know what we can do. I scarcely think that I can go and hear him to-night. One owes something to one's self respect."

Mrs. Bossington was arranging carnations in a brass bowl, and but for a well-established habit of self-restraint she might have spilled some water at this outburst.

"What do you mean, Priscilla?" she said, slowly revolving.

Miss Atkey primmed her lips—an almost unnecessary process.

"He swore!" she said. "It was at the station. I had gone to change a book at the stall. Quite by accident I got there as his train came in. I saw him get out—a mere boy. Indeed, he looks

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more like a youthful football-player than a lecturer. His language—"

"Are you quite sure of it?" asked Mrs. Bossington.

"I heard it," said Miss Atkey, "only too distinctly. It was about his evening clothes. It seems that they have got left behind somewhere, though he had seen them put on the train himself. He behaved like a maniac. The poor station-master was quite abashed. I do not think he had ever heard such language before."

"Good gracious!" said Mrs. Bossington, uneasily.

"Certainly I never have," said Miss Atkey, "and I imagine Phyllis Watherstone never has. She was waiting for him. When he became aware of that, his manner changed from a navvy's to a French actor's. He swept off his hat in the most exaggerated manner and began begging her pardon."

"What did he say?" asked Mrs. Bossington, judicially.

"He said 'I trust you did not hear me. If I had known that the secretary—are you the secretary of the Literary and what's-its-name Club?—was so kindly meeting me, I should have been more prosaic.' Prosaic!" Miss Atkey tilted her nose. "Then he went galloping on about his clothes and the management of railways, and how, if he were appointed dictator, he would introduce some dreadful practice which it seems they have



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in Nepal of smearing railway officials with honey and tying them up on a pole for ants to eat—all at the top of his voice, my dear Mrs. Bossington, with the poor station-master at his side. He ended up by again remembering that Phyllis was there, and apologizing still more profoundly, and explaining that it all came—his language—from what he called ‘the atrocious habit of writing poetry and getting inspirations at inopportune moments.’ I call it almost blasphemous—as much as saying that Longfellow was in the habit of swearing.”

“It certainly seems rather terrible,” said Mrs. Bossington. “What did Phyllis do?”

Miss Atkey shook her head sombrely.

“Phyllis laughed and said what did he think clothes mattered to poets? She would give him a laurel wreath to wear. I suppose she thought it was clever. Very young girls of the present day have no reserve.”

But Mrs. Bossington was for the moment more curious than critical.

“Did she succeed in calming him at all?” she inquired.

“Calming him!” said Miss Atkey, with indignation. “He raved. He said ‘You are an angel. If all the members of the Philosophic-and-Thingummy set’—that is the way he referred to us—‘are like you, I shall love them to distraction. It isn’t safe for me to lecture to them. I shall go back. I am a bachelor. Why should I risk my

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freedom?' As if any of us would look at a man like that!"

"It seems a pity that he didn't go back," said Mrs. Bossington, but not altogether regretfully.

"Not he," said Miss Atkey. "Of course Phyllis made no sign of taking him at his word, as I should have done; and they got into Mrs. Watherstone's carriage together and drove off, he apparently in a most jovial mood and explaining exceedingly loudly—how he got to the subject I cannot think—the way in which a field-battery goes into action."

"How very extraordinary!" said Mrs. Bossington. "I suppose he could not have been intoxicated?"

"I don't think so. I think it is second nature with him."

"A form of mania," suggested Mrs. Bossington.

"Exactly," said Miss Atkey, "and so bad a form that I have been wondering if I ought not to warn dear Mrs. Watherstone."

It was a mission not without its interesting side, but after much discussion Mrs. Bossington advised against it. She felt that, after her action in supporting the Society's new movement, it would be weakness to dismiss unheard the first lecturer that came.

The two ladies therefore contented themselves with throwing out guarded hints to such other members as they happened to meet in the course

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of the afternoon. So guarded had they been that it is safe to say that only on the famous occasion when the Princess Engénie visited the Society had members been half so excited. The prevailing feeling as they entered Mrs. Watherstone's salon was that the lecturer was a dangerous person, and that it behooved them to be wary.

"He appears to have obtained his evening clothes," whispered Mrs. Bossington to Miss Atkey as the lecturer, who had been talking with Mr. and Mrs. Watherstone, stepped forward before his audience.

"No doubt the poor station-master was terrorised into getting them," replied Miss Atkey. "Look at Mrs. Watherstone's face. She is already dreadfully uneasy. She has heard him talk at dinner."

There was no time to say more, for Mr. Danesford had begun.

"Ladies and gentlemen,—When I am invited to lecture on extraordinarily intricate and difficult subjects like 'Modern Philosophy,' I generally begin by asking myself who are the people I am to lecture to? Are they simple souls who merely wish to be mystified and then patted on the back and assured that they are philosophers? If so, I will pat them on the back. I will pat them very gently. They will be intensely gratified and think me a great lecturer. Ninety per cent. of the people I lecture to are of this sort. But I saw at once,

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as soon as I landed at your station, that you were of the remaining ten. Already at dinner I have met two of your members of the utmost intelligence—”

“I call it rude,” whispered Miss Atkey, “his leaving out Mr. Watherstone so obviously.”

Mrs. Bossington s-s-shed. The lecturer proceeded.

“Ex pede Herculem. It is the only Latin I remember, and it means I judge your Society by those members. Therefore I shall not be afraid to say what I think. My thoughts go a very little way, as you will find, but I shall at least make them go all the way of which they are capable—”

It was after these preliminary words that there came, as Miss Atkey said later, the deluge. Possibly Mr. Danesford was brilliant. Undoubtedly he spoke in a very loud voice. But the whole lecture was nothing more than shocking wildness. And the Society was almost unanimous in recognising this. Any one less intent than Mr. Danesford might have noticed how the less prominent members began by staring and went on to look pained; how Mrs. Watherstone grew a pink spot in both her cheeks; how Miss Atkey closed her note-book with a bang that indicated at once disgust and challenge; how the Rev. Upton James half rose from his chair with a face such as Archbishop Cranmer might have worn when thrusting

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his hand into the flames, but sank back again, too overcome by his emotions to protest.

As Mr. Danesford came to the end of his short but wild and loud harangue, there was every sign that for the first time since it had been started Mrs. Watherstone's salon night was to prove a fiasco.

How the fiasco was averted by the wit of a single maiden remains to be told. It had been decided by the committee that immediately after the lecture had come to an end there should be an interval for refreshment; after which members should be at liberty to make short informal speeches and to ask questions. Usually this interval was one of intellectual relaxation, in which ladies who perhaps a moment before had been deep in a discussion of Christian Science talked about fancy-work or the best way to cure a cold in the head. Laughter and trivialities were, in fact, not unknown. To-night the room was filled with a suppressed murmur, such as might have gone on in the half-lighted meeting-places of the Jacobins during the French Revolution. Among all those gloomy faces, Mr. Danesford's, as he sought out Phyllis Watherstone, with a glass of claret in one hand and two large sandwiches in the other, seemed offensively cheerful.

"Well," he said, with a child-like vanity, which, however, Phyllis thought was rather nice, considering what a destructive talent the man had, "what

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do you think of me? Did I say the sort of things I ought to have said?"

Phyllis looked at him. He was quite genuinely persuaded that he had been successful; and that weakness pleased her. She had been rather afraid of the greatness of his intellect before.

"I don't know about that," she said, calmly; "you've certainly succeeded in shocking everybody."

"What!" he said, in a roar of hurt amazement.

Phyllis held up a small front finger.

"You're not to shout," she said.

"But you are criticising me. You are knocking me down. I will talk in a whisper, but remember that you are flattening me upon the ground."

Phyllis smiled at his notion of a whisper.

"You asked me to criticise," she said, warningly.

"But how—why—what have I done?"

"You have treated us as if we were a collection of advanced thinkers. Nothing," said Phyllis, "could be more offensive."

"You tell me that?" he answered, in loud reproach.

"Why shouldn't I?" asked Phyllis.

"Because, if I have done so, it is your fault. I have said that when I come to this sort of place I place great restraint upon myself. I am a lecturer. It is my living. I ask ten guineas from the benighted people who wish to hear me. But shock them? No. That is to kill the birds that lay the

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golden guineas. I bind myself not to make them think."

"But—" began Phyllis.

"But here I say it is your fault. At the very station I meet a secretary who is an angel."

"I am not the secretary, and I wish you would not talk so loud," interposed Phyllis.

"What does it matter? At any rate I meet a seraph of the utmost intelligence who is attached to the Society. She represents it. My heart is warmed. Instantly I say to myself. 'At last I have met the Society the lecturer dreams of—the Society to which he can speak all that he can think.' Is that reasonable?"

"No," said Phyllis. "Even if I had been that sort of person, why should you infer that I represent the others?"

"Why not? This is not the jungle. I am in the house of a great scientist, Mr. Watherstone, whose name I respect above most men's."

"But Port Allington," said Phyllis, "isn't scientific. In Port Allington we only like cultured people. We consider that my uncle wastes his time in poking about for shells. He is only a member on sufferance, because my aunt is president, and he likes to listen to her."

"But you did not," said Mr. Danesford, gloomily, "expect me to realize that these worthy members of yours were intellectually rabbits and dormice."

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Phyllis with difficulty concealed a smile.

"Please try to remember that they are friends of my aunt's and mine."

"Oh, most certainly," he said, apologetic in spite of his gloom.

"Whose feelings you have already hurt very much," added Phyllis, severely.

"Gracious heavens!" he said. "What am I to do? Shall I retract? Shall I tell the small lady with the fierce spectacles that I admire Christian Science? Shall I tell the clerical, meek gentleman that Nirvana is good for his liver? I will make any reparation that you demand. On my knees, if you wish it, I will read to them *The Old Arm-Chair* of the poetess Cook; also the *May Queen* of Tennyson; also— But you are angry with me?"

"I'm a little angry," said Phyllis, "because I know that my aunt will be vexed if one of her salon nights is a failure, and my uncle will be vexed for her. Apart from that I think I am only a little frightened."

"Of what?"

"Of being made your scapegoat," said Phyllis. "You see, everybody will attack you when you get back into the other room. You will retaliate with the horrid professional skill of a clever man. They will be still more annoyed, and when you have gone I shall be jumped upon for having proposed to get you down."



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Mr. Danesford smote his head and put down his glass of claret.

"Never," he said. "You shall never suffer on my behalf."

"But how will you prevent it?" said Phyllis, seeing that he had begun eating more sandwiches.

"I will fly. I will pretend to be beaten, and I will make my escape. Now. I will tell you how I will do it. I have received a telegram. My aunt is dead. I must catch the last train up to town at all hazards—to be in time for her funeral." He put down his sandwich, evidently delighted with his own inventive powers. "I will go this moment," he said, "and announce it to your uncle."

Phyllis thought his precipitancy lovely, but there was one objection.

"If your aunt were dead, there would not be quite such a hurry, would there?"

"What a critic you are!" he said, damped.

"She might be dying," said Phyllis.

At that he brightened again.

"She shall be dying," he said. "Of double pleurisy. I desire to ask her pardon on her death-bed for my wildness. She brought me up from a child. I am off to Mr. Watherstone this moment."

Phyllis, brushed aside by his haste, saw him go to her uncle and buttonhole him, gesticulating violently. Mr. Watherstone went across to his

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wife. Perhaps members had been conscious that something unexpected was going to happen, for conversation ceased just at that moment. Mrs. Watherstone took advantage of the silence to tap the table and say: "I regret to have to inform the Society that Mr. Danesford has just received news of the dangerous illness of a near and dear relative. He hopes to catch the last train to-night, and begs that you will excuse his hurried departure."

"The more"—Phyllis was horrified to hear Mr. Danesford suddenly speaking up for himself—"as much of my lecture was highly debatable and open to that criticism and correction which all lecturers rejoice in, especially when it comes from critics of the intelligence of those I see before me. Such criticism would have been for our mutual edification. But my aunt is old. I beg you to excuse her—me, I mean."

He had meant well at the last, Phyllis thought, even if he had not quite succeeded; and no doubt that was what induced Mrs. Watherstone to say graciously:

"I am sure we are all obliged by the trouble Mr. Danesford has taken in coming down and speaking to us."

There was some slight clapping, which he acknowledged with a bow. Then he turned to Mr. Watherstone.

"Do you know when my train starts?" he asked.

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"It goes in about ten minutes," said Mr. Watherstone. "I'll walk down with you if I may."

They left the room together; and having completed its refreshment, the Literary and Philosophic Society trooped back into the drawing-room and began to ventilate its opinions upon Mr. Danesford's preposterous lecture.

Phyllis, listening to the speeches, of which for fire and tenacity Miss Atkey's excelled, while for subtlety and well-controlled mysticism the Rev. Upton James' might have been awarded the palm, felt that by despatching Mr. Danesford about his business she had done an excellent thing. If she had been guilty of introducing the nettle, she had also found the dock-leaves. Had he remained behind, the attack upon him would have been sullen but spiritless. There would, so to speak, have been no joy of fighting. Convinced though they would have been of the justice of their cause, the consciousness that they were amateurs against a professional would have deprived the Port Allington orators of their morale. Now it was different. They fell upon Mr. Danesford tooth and nail. But they did it joyously, light-heartedly. They still smarted from the wounds he had quite unconsciously dealt them, but they no longer cowered under the fear of his presence. The reaction was so great that, whereas solemnity was usually the mark of a good speech in Port Allington, to-night an almost frolicsome spirit of raillery prevailed.

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References to the audacity of young men were not uncommon. The Rev. Upton James conceived a happy metaphor about a boy who for sheer mischief tears the wings off insects of a higher development than his own.

Before an hour had passed, the sense of soreness and doubt had worn off and the Society was its self-contained, cultured self once more. Mrs. Bossington voiced a very general sentiment when, as the meeting was adjourned, she floated up to the President and said:

"Once again, my dear Mrs. Watherstone, we have had a delightful evening. We all feel, I am sure, that our first lecturer has been a great success."

"As a target for our arrows," said Miss Atkey. "It was a pity in my opinion that he had to go away. He would have learnt something if he had stopped."

"Yes, indeed," said Mrs. Bossington.

"Though he would have felt rather mercilessly riddled," added Miss Atkey.

Thus genially conversing, they had stepped into the hall, and there, talking away at the top of his voice, was Mr. Danesford. He had his ulster on, but no hat, and beside him was Mr. Watherstone with a hat on but no overcoat. Members came to a simultaneous halt. You might almost have said that a shiver ran through their intellectual ranks. Their President was the first to collect herself.

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"What is the meaning of this, Mr. Watherstone?" she said, sharply. "Has Mr. Danesford lost his train?"

The engrossed Mr. Watherstone turned round, observed the influx, and faltered.

"N-n-not exactly."

"On the contrary," Mr. Danesford broke in, in his most extravagant manner and apparently quite unabashed, "may I be forgiven if we've not been so busy arguing that we forgot to start!" His buoyant self-possession under these distressing circumstances was so complete that Phyllis in the background was seized with sudden irresistible laughter. He heard it and looked in her direction. "I wonder," he said, thoughtfully, "if I still have time for my train?"

"No," said Miss Atkey, snappily, "you have not. It went an hour ago at least. And I very greatly fear that your poor aunt—" she primmed her mouth and had her sentence finished for her by Mr. Danesford.

"Will die unrepentant," he said, mournfully. "I should say, unforgiving. What a pity!" With these extraordinary words and in the excessively exaggerated manner that Miss Atkey had disliked from the first, he bent toward Mrs. Watherstone. "I wonder," he said, "if I might trespass on your great hospitality so far as to spend the night here, after all?"

"Oh, of course," said Mrs. Watherstone, who

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was never lacking as hostess. "I shall be delighted."

"You are too kind," said Mr. Danesford, and strolled leisurely across to where Phyllis stood.

The members of the Literary and Philosophic Society trooped out, a little less elated than they had been. So might an army march which, having fought valiantly in the dark and conquered, finds in the morning that it has vanquished phantoms only. Miss Atkey and Mrs. Bossington were sharing a cab back, and for a while neither of them spoke. Miss Atkey was the first to break the somewhat oppressive silence.

"Well," she said, in a tone of finality, "thank Heaven I am no connection of that Mr. Danesford!"

"His aunt, you mean?" said Mrs. Bossington, absent-mindedly.

Miss Atkey had not meant that, but it was not worth controverting.

"Any connection of his," she said, shortly.

"Yes, indeed," said Mrs. Bossington, but scarcely with the fervor that Miss Atkey expected. Her thoughts were evidently wandering on some other subject. Presently it came out. "I wonder if Mr. Danesford lost his train on purpose?"

"What do you mean?" said Miss Atkey.

"So that he might see more of Phyllis," Mrs. Bossington explained.

## SOARING SPIRITS

**S**OARING spirits are often hampered not only by the opposition of duller and more philistine souls, but also by their own delicate perception of the offence which, while soaring with the best intentions in the world, they are alas! likely to give.

This difficulty confronted the Dramatic Subcommittee of the Port Allington Literary and Philosophic Society almost from the start. The D. S.—as it grew to be called familiarly by the other members—had come into being as the result of a paper read to the society by Mr. Jernyngham Mills. At least, except for that paper, it would not have been thought of, as Mr. Mills repentantly realised later on. But it is only fair to say—with Miss Tindal Atkey—that the real cause was “Our determination not to shrink from the logical position in which we found ourselves.”

The logical position was this: Mr. Jernyngham Mills had taken as his thesis “That the Stage is Second only to the Pulpit as a Moral Factor,” and had, as every one agreed, proved his contention to the hilt. It was usual to prove your contention to the hilt when you read a paper to the Literary and Philosophic Society. Mr. Mills

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had not gone into disagreeable details, but members felt, as they listened, that Ibsen and Bernard Shaw, to whose works he referred with tactful vagueness, must indeed be accounted reformers. Their plays—said Mr. Mills—were very terrible, but at times we needed such reminders. Nobody really supposed that in giving this support to the higher drama Mr. Mills meant that Port Allington needed these terrible reminders or that he personally hankered after the theatre.

Most unfairly, however, halfway through discussion-time, an inference to that effect was drawn by Mr. Johnstone, one of the younger members of the society. Up till then things had taken their usual course. Mr. Mills had been thanked for his very able and powerful paper, which—said the Rev. Upton James—gave one to think. Mrs. Watherstone had deplored the levity of the metropolitan stage. She agreed with Mr. Mills that it was a pity that our actor-managers should so evade their crying responsibilities. Miss Atkey said that we must bow our heads in shame before the Scandinavians. Where were the playwrights to compare with Ibsen? And what drama could we show to equal *Ghosts*—a play of which Mr. Mills had spoken with high, but not too high, appreciation. Miss Atkey herself had no hesitation in describing *Ghosts* as one of the noblest attempts to remove a moral ulcer threatening society that the playhouse had ever witnessed.



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It was during the applause following this speech that young Mr. Johnstone rose and asked why—if the stage was second only in importance to the pulpit, as Mr. Mills had shown that it was—Port Allingtonians should possess no opportunities of benefiting by it.

Mr. Watherstone, husband of the Society's President and usually a silent member, suddenly said, "Hear, hear!" and was echoed by several of the younger members.

"Perhaps Mr. Jernyngham Mills could explain to us," said Mr. Johnstone, thus encouraged, and sat down.

Mr. Mills rose. He was a quiet man, a banker, with a forehead that suggested thinking power, and a smile that was sarcastic if you noticed it. Commonplace people would hardly be aware that Mr. Mills was smiling sarcastically.

"I can only point out that there is no theatre in Port Allington," he said.

Unaware that he had been gently crushed, Mr. Johnstone rose again.

"The Institute has a very fair stage," he said. "Why should that not be used?"

"The difficulties are too great," said Mr. Mills.

"In what way?" asked Mr. Johnstone, unfortunately.

Mr. Mills fenced. The chief difficulty was that the Town Council did not particularly favor the idea of dramatic companies invading Port Allington.

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ton, and had on one or two occasions opposed applications. Mr. Mills did not mention this, because, as a philosopher, he had just been advocating what as a Councillor he had condemned; and philosophers do not care to show themselves narrow-minded at the moment when they are—so to speak—glowing with philosophy.

“The first difficulty that strikes me,” he therefore said, “is that no company—no good company—would care to play before such a small audience as Port Allington would be likely to provide.”

“Hear, hear!” said Mrs. Watherstone, Miss Tindal Atkey, and Mrs. Bossington together, and Mr. Mills thought the danger was past.

Most unfortunately, Mr. Johnstone, who was in any case a persistent young man, had just been visiting Deeds, and he rose to explain how this affected the subject.

“Deeds,” he said, “is no bigger than Port Allington, yet excellent companies perform there. Deeds manages it very simply. They have a society very like our own, which invites companies to come and guarantees them against loss by undertaking that members shall each buy so many tickets.”

“Hear, hear!” said Mr. Watherstone, again, stupidly, and Mr. Mills looked about him, slightly alarmed.

“It sounds simple,” he said, “but—but——”

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"Companies jump at the offer," interrupted Mr. Johnstone. "They'd come here too like a shot if we wanted them. Perhaps we don't. I may be mistaken, but in Port Allington, though we are uncommonly progressive in theory, we seem to stick when it comes to practice. I don't say that is the attitude of this Society, but it looks very like it."

Here was a hit at the older members, and an unpleasant hit. In a moment they found themselves in the painful predicament of either having to act upon the unguarded enthusiasm for the drama which Mr. Mills's paper had drawn from them, or to seem mere talkers.

This is what Miss Atkey meant by "the logic of our position."

She did not shrink from it. Seeing Mr. Mills unready, she rose, and speaking on behalf of those who had taken part in the discussion, she declared that nothing would give them greater pleasure than to see the higher drama performed at Port Allington. Perhaps she spoke too warmly. Perhaps Mr. Johnstone was clever at seeing his opportunity. It remains to state that, before the meeting broke up—amid a fervor for the drama which no one could have prognosticated—the Dramatic Subcommittee had come into being and was pledged to produce a play in Port Allington upon the earliest possible date. Mr. Jernyngham Mills found himself its chairman, Mr. Johnstone was its secretary, and

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Mrs. Watherstone and Miss Tindale Atkey had been appointed to the committee.

It was not until he was driving back in his carriage that Mr. Mills, who had been giving—somewhat at random—authoritative accounts of how a theatre should be managed, remembered with sudden discomfort what a number of people there were in Port Allington who regarded the stage as an abominable thing. It was a narrow view to take of the stage, of course, very narrow. But there it was. The Town Council, for instance, had undoubtedly been discouraging. It had no rights over the Institute stage, provided payment was guaranteed, but it would not help. Perhaps its attitude was due to the levity of the plays that had been suggested. Mr. Mills could not recall the particular plays, but he felt sure that this accounted for his own attitude as a Councillor. How differently one felt toward plays of real moral purpose! Scraps from the paper he had just read, which in its turn had been derived largely from articles in some of the highest-class magazines, rose to Mr. Mills's mind and supported him. As an educational factor the power of the stage ought to be enormous. That was not merely what he thought, but what the magazines had said. Look at Ibsen. Mr. Mills had not had time to read Ibsen as thoroughly as he could have wished, but there could be no possible doubt that Ibsen was a reformer. It was a pity, perhaps, that reformers are so out-

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spoken. But anything rather than frivolity. And it was frivolity that prejudiced people against the stage. Mrs. Mills, for example, had that sort of prejudice. At least it was scarcely prejudice. Her parents had not approved of it, and though she herself was eminently fair-minded, she had not felt the need of theatre-going. "One can get on without it; for I have done so myself," she had once said to him. "So has Agatha." But they would surely both enjoy the higher drama—capably and reverently acted in Port Allington.

The sense of being in a way a conspirator, which worried Mr. Mills on his drive home, was present also in the cab which Mrs. Bossington shared, as was her habit, with Miss Tindale Atkey. Only Mrs. Bossington was perhaps more excited than worried by the prospect of what Port Allington would think of it all. She wished that Miss Atkey would talk about it, but the thinner and maiden lady was wrapped in profound thought. Mrs. Bossington could not see her face clearly—owing to the inadequate lighting of the cab—except when they passed lamp-posts. Then it wore a look of high if gloomy resolve. She seemed, indeed, so abstracted that Mrs. Bossington hardly liked to disturb her. But in the end her own feeling of awed curiosity, to which might be added the least touch of envy, impelled her to say: "I suppose as a committee member you will be able to go

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behind the scenes. The Greenroom! I have always wanted to see a Greenroom."

Mrs. Bossington pictured it as a romantically scandalous place, at once flaring and shadowy, in which magnificent Bohemians lounged in velveteen jackets, and superb serpentine young ladies sat on the edge of tables in pink tights and had champagne drunk out of their slippers. A lurid but tempting scene, into which Miss Atkey did not somehow seem to fit. Mrs. Bossington felt that without in any way yielding to the temptations of such a place or giving the least countenance to anything improper, she would herself have got more enjoyment from it.

"The Greenroom," she repeated, as Miss Atkey remained wrapped in thought. "I suppose when they are not on the stage they must put something round their legs. Tights must be so very——"

"Really," said Miss Atkey, coming sharply out of her brown study, "if people of your standing are going to indulge in mere vulgar curiosity with regard to what goes on behind the scenes, our dramatic ventures are hardly likely to improve the mind as much as we hope."

"I was only wondering," said Mrs. Bossington, abashed, "if being dressed in tights didn't——"

"There will not, I am glad to say, be any question of inviting the actresses whom we employ to adopt any of the degrading garments to which

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you refer. I, at any rate, shall stand for full-dress plays."

"But surely," began Mrs. Bossington, a little hurt—"surely even Shakespeare's heroines——"

"Shakespeare, as often played," said Miss Atkey, "is not as educational as he should be. Indeed, except for the Hensons' Company, I know of none who gives reverent performances of the master. I wish we could get them. In any case, plays in which men and women, seriously minded and adequately clothed, play natural and improving parts will be insisted upon by the committee."

"Oh, I hope so, I'm sure," said Mrs. Bossington, a little disappointed, nevertheless.

"We shall make it very clear," said Miss Atkey. "Managers who undertake to work for us will understand that in coming to Port Allington they are coming to a place where cultured drama is wanted. We do not want pantomime."

"Of course not," Mrs. Bossington agreed. "But it will be very exciting seeing all these actors and people. All right, Pratts. I am getting out, thank you." This last was to the driver, who had drawn up in front of Mrs. Bossington's residence and signified that it was time Mrs. Bossington alighted. It was always a lengthy process, Mrs. Bossington being a stout lady. But it was accomplished at last, and Pratts was at liberty to drive Miss Atkey on to her rooms, where, after paying him and advising him to make himself a cup of warm soup

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if he felt thirsty when he got home, her first action was to go to the bookshelf and take down a volume of Ibsen. She had borrowed it from the Town Library a few days before with a view to delivering expert criticisms of Mr. Mills's paper should they be necessary. She looked at it with even more interest now. The volume contained *Ghosts*, two other plays, and an introduction highly praising the works of the dramatist. Miss Atkey had read the introduction first—as being in slightly the larger print—and it had given her such a grasp of the author's meaning that she had not actually gone through the plays themselves. Now she sat down and read *Ghosts*. *Ghosts* was one of the plays which the committee before breaking up had already decided to try for—owing to Mr. Mills's warm appreciation of it in his paper; owing in part, too, to her own statement that it was one of the noblest efforts to remove an ulcer threatening society that the playhouse had ever witnessed. *Ghosts* is not a cheerful play to read at midnight, but Miss Atkey went through it self-controlled and dry-lipped. When she had come to the end, she turned to the introduction to see why she had said that it was such a noble effort. Apparently the introducer thought so. He had, in fact, used almost those very words. Miss Atkey did not retract them—far from it—but she went at the other two plays with lips even more tightly set. The introducer had not passed a verdict upon them, and

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Miss Atkey did not do so now. She could be a Brutus to her own emotions. But as she closed the book to go to bed, she had for a moment a vision of the stage of the Institute about to be stalked by these nightmares and all Port Allington seated in front of it in cheerful curiosity and ignorance. And she murmured aloud:

“Poor Mr. Jernyngham Mills!”

It was Miss Atkey's habit to polish daily with her own hands the silver toast-rack in which the more substantial portion of her breakfast was served, and she did not neglect that duty next morning. The moment it was finished, however, she set out with her volume of Ibsen to the Town Library. The thought in her mind was: “There are other volumes of Ibsen, containing further plays. This great reformer cannot have been equally appalling throughout his career. Something there must be of his which will uplift without shocking.” If not, Miss Atkey remembered that there were other moral dramatists. The names of Hauptmann and Shaw occurred to her. She would examine them. Determined and brisk in spite of her overnight's reading, Miss Atkey tramped to the library, and just as she got there she met Mr. Jernyngham Mills.

Mr. Mills was less brisk outwardly, less determined in his soul. He too had come to the library to get up the higher drama, but he had not slept as well as Miss Atkey. Doubts as to the

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practical presentability of the higher dramatists had oppressed him during the night. Also, on his way to the town, he had met two men—business acquaintances whom he did not particularly care about—and they had stopped him to say:

“What’s all this about your bringing over a theatrical company?”

Mr. Mills had attempted his sarcastic smile as he replied:

“I don’t fancy the plays will be in your line.”

“Here, you aren’t going to keep it all to yourself, are you?” said one of them, and had winked at his companion. Mr. Mills was annoyed. For one thing, he had not supposed that any one outside the Society had as yet heard of the scheme. Mrs. Mills had not. He had thought of telling her, but he had postponed it. For another thing, why should he be considered responsible for the idea? The Society was responsible—or rather young Johnstone. In the middle of these thoughts he was greeted by another person, namely, Mr. Webstone. Mr. Webstone was the most privileged man in Port Allington. Indeed, he was the only man who could have lived down so many rumors of a wild and misspent youth—rumors to which he himself used to refer with mysterious chuckles and no sense of shame—and become so popular. Every one was glad to know Mr. Webstone. Perhaps it was because his youth was far off, and he was such a charitable and hearty old man. Mr. Mills

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had no chance of avoiding him, though he wished that it was not Main Street in which they had met, and inwardly resented the way Mr. Webstone dug him in the ribs as he said: "Hullo, Mills! I've heard about you. Goin' to bring a troupe of actors here—hey?"

He had a voice like a bull's, and Mr. Mills glanced uneasily about him as he murmured disjointedly:

"A long-felt want in Port Allington. Only the finest drama, of course. We hope for the Hensons. As an educational factor——"

Mr. Webstone was slightly deaf, and rarely listened to other people in any case.

"Pretty chorus-girls?" he bellowed, pursuing his own, too free thoughts.

"Nothing of the kind," said Mr. Mills.

"Ha!" roared Mr. Webstone. "I shall have to pop in if the gout will let me. When I was a young chap—by Jove!—there was nothing like a pretty actress. What does Mrs. Mills think about it, though, hey?"

It was useless to prolong such a conversation, and Mr. Mills escaped at the earliest possible opportunity. He was relieved to find no one but a fellow thinker like Miss Atkey at the library, and he picked up a little at sight of her.

"I have just come to get out some of the dramatists to read them through again."

"A clash of ideas," said Miss Atkey, and

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held up her volume. "I am just returning this to the library. I do not know if you would care to have it. It contains three of Ibsen's plays."

"Ah—er—oh yes—*Ghosts!*" Mr. Mills's face fell at sight of the title. "We spoke of playing *Ghosts*, didn't we?"

"We did," said Miss Atkey, tersely.

"Er—a powerful play," suggested Mr. Mills. "You know it, of course."

"Yes," said Miss Atkey.

Her tone made Mr. Mills nervous.

"Do you find it too—too gloomy?"

Miss Atkey seldom minced words.

"It is unspeakably horrible," she said, "but we have to face that. What other audiences can listen to, Port Allington can."

"Yes, yes, of course," said Mr. Mills. "I was only thinking that there are others which perhaps . . . there is one about ducks, isn't there—wild ducks?"

"The *Wild Duck*," said Miss Atkey; "yes—it is extremely painful. All the plays in this volume are painful. I think I should advise you to look through them before we have the next committee meeting. I think myself of getting up Bernard Shaw."

"He has been censored," said Mr. Mills, miserably. "It seems to be the fate of reformers . . . with the exception of Shakespeare. I rather hope

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myself that we shall get the Hensons to act some of his plays."

"Yes," said Miss Atkey. "But we must not be deterred from staging things merely because they are painful," and she went in search of Shaw, leaving Ibsen to Mr. Mills, who took that tremendous writer to the bank with him.

Luckily, or unluckily, there was little work to be done, and he had time to plunge deeply into that morose and tragic life which Ibsen has depicted. His soul revolted at it, Ibsen was right, of course, in showing up these hideous immoralities, but why should he who was not hideously immoral—still more, why should Mrs. Mills, who was entirely virtuous, and Agatha, their innocent daughter—have to face this monstrous knowledge? Moreover—would Mrs. Mills face it? That question, perhaps more than the other, pressed itself upon Mr Mills as he sat in his room revolving life's responsibilities. Willy-nilly he had become chairman of the Dramatic Subcommittee and had undertaken to purchase ten tickets for the first play. The money was nothing. But when the tickets were purchased, suppose Mrs. Mills declined to use them? Could the servants be sent instead? No. They would, if possible, be more shocked than Mrs. Mills. They were remarkably good servants, but just because of that they would walk out from *Ghosts* horrified. Mr. Mills could almost see Sarah, the parlor-maid, handing the potatoes with shrink-

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ing hands to an employer whom she could no longer respect. For the first time in his life the virtue that pervaded his home threatened Mr. Mills's happiness, and it was with a heavy heart that he decided that he must, before the play was actually fixed upon, get Mrs. Mills to have some idea of what it meant. If only she could be persuaded that Ibsen was a moralist, all would be well. Could she be? She was not literary, and Mr. Mills knew only too well what a difference culture makes to one's insight into that higher morality which on the surface is apt to appear so—well, so offensive. He wished he had informed her about the Dramatic Subcommittee at once.

Confidence deferred no longer carries with it that persuasive flattery that lies in all true confidence. As a result the sympathy of the person confided in is sparingly offered, if not altogether withheld. This happened when on his return home Mr. Mills mentioned to his wife that he had undertaken the chairmanship of the D. S.

"Mrs. Bossington told me so this morning," she said, a little coolly.

Mrs. Mills was a gentle, obstinate little lady, with brows always puckered. She regarded Mr. Mills as so intensely clever as to be certain to go wrong in all matters pertaining to life's every-day affairs. She was too proud of this trait not to humor it as far as possible, but she felt that she had to guide him, too.

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"I was a little surprised, Jernyngham," she went on, "to find that *you* had given in to this craze for theatricals."

"My dear," said Mr. Mills, deprecatingly, "theatricals is hardly the word. What I—what the Society hopes to produce—is only the very finest drama."

Mrs. Mills nodded her head patiently.

"I don't wish to argue about that," she said, "but have you considered Agatha?"

"Er—in what way precisely?" asked Mr. Mills.

"In the way," said Mrs. Mills, seriously, "that I think every parent should consider his only child. You know that there is an insidious fascination about the footlights. Agatha has never been to the theatre. Suppose that she was so carried away by it all that she developed a passion for the actress's life? You know how quick she is. Could you bear your daughter to leave us and perhaps go on the London boards?"

The supposition had certainly not struck Mr. Mills, but he rather welcomed it. It was distinctly less formidable than the one he had wrought himself up about.

"I don't think," he said, "that there is any real danger. You see, the higher drama—Ibsen and so forth——"

"Well?" said Mrs. Mills, as he paused.

"Does not appeal in that way," said Mr. Mills.

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"For example, dresses and dancing are practically unknown to it."

"Oh!" said Mrs. Mills, somewhat taken aback.

"Yes. Ibsen ignored such things," said Mr. Mills, with forced enthusiasm. "He went for reality. He attacked social evils. The glamour of romance he detested. In fact, my only anxiety in regard to Agatha is whether she may not find Ibsen's plays too depressing."

"Depressing?"

"It's difficult to explain," said Mr. Mills. "Vice was to Ibsen such a terrible thing that—that—But I think you would understand best from the plays themselves. I brought back one or two volumes of Ibsen with me on purpose."

"I'll take a look at them if I have time," said Mrs. Mills, grudgingly. "I cannot see that Port Allington requires these theatricals or whatever you prefer to call them. Still, if you have committed yourself to buy tickets, I suppose we shall have to use them, though neither Agatha nor I are a bit frivolous-minded."

It was a respite. Mr. Mills was too introspective a man to regard it as more than that. He had not broached the real subject. He had left that to broach itself, so to speak, and for the next day or two he was conscious of starting when Mrs. Mills's eyes fixed themselves upon him. Had she read the plays, and was she too horrified to speak to him of them? Or had she not found time as



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yet? Or was it possible that she had skimmed them and, though slightly shocked (she must be that), accepted his valuation with wifely meekness?

As it turned out, Mr. Mills had to go off upon business before these questions were answered. He had to go off the day before that fixed for the D. S. meeting, and would on his return be compelled to drive straight from the station to Mrs. Watherstone's if he wished to be in time. Here was a chance of getting at Mrs. Mills's views of Ibsen without direct discussion. He waited until he was just going off, and then said:

"By the way, my dear, you have not told me what you think about those plays yet. Perhaps you will have a chance of looking at them while I am away. If so, you might send me a line to the station before I go on to the meeting. I should like to have your views."

Mrs. Mills was flattered.

"You know they won't be very intellectual, Jernyngham," she said, "but I'll send you a line if you like."

"Just a line," said Mr. Mills; and coming back, weary with business the following day, found himself by the light of his carriage lamp reading the following:

MY DEAREST JERNYNGHAM:—I began to read those terrible books, but I do not wish to talk about them. I have never interfered with what you call

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your literary and philosophic interests, as I consider that a man is entitled, if he believes it to do any good, to dip into subjects which are best avoided. But I cannot believe that you wish Agatha and myself to witness such things. If it is too late to change them, all I ask is that you will let me know as soon as possible the date of the performances, as I wish to arrange to take poor Agatha to stay at Deeds with Uncle Saunderson until they are over.

Still your loving wife,

AGNES JERNYNHAM MILLS.

Mr. Mills was so pale when he got to Mrs. Watherstone's that Mr. Watherstone, who met him in the hall, accused him of having caught a chill.

"A slight one," Mr. Mills admitted, for convenience' sake, and was not sorry for the glass of liqueur brandy which Mr. Watherstone insisted upon giving him before showing him into the drawing-room. There Mr. Mills learned that the Hensons, whom he had hoped frantically that young Johnstone would secure, were not available for at least a year, and that young Johnstone was bringing with him the manager of another company, who was prepared to produce almost anything that the committee desired. The two appeared a minute or two later, Mr. Paunceley Foote—whom Mrs. Watherstone received very graciously, Miss Atkey with a frosty bow—proving to be a youngish

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man, self-possessed, sprightly in the legs, but with a haggard face and Irvingesque hair. He had been prepared by Johnstone on the way up for the people he was to meet, and had, as it were, his cue.

"It's an unusual pleasure, sir," he said, as he shook Mr. Mills's somewhat lifeless hand, "to be among people who want the real thing."

"Not at all," Mr. Mills murmured.

"I need hardly add," said Mr. Foote, "that the real thing doesn't pay."

"Really?" said Miss Atkey, and Mrs. Watherstone looked sympathetic.

"Art never does," went on Mr. Paunceley Foote. "Luckily, some of us are prepared to make sacrifices for it."

As a matter of fact, on the way up with Johnstone—who, after shaking Mr. Foote heartily by the hand, had inquired how Miss Kitty Caley was, Miss Caley being one of Mr. Foote's most sparkling young ladies, and had been informed that Kitty was all there, and looking forward to seeing Mr. J.—Mr. Foote had inquired dismally whether it was a fact that they wanted Ibsen.

"Of course, old man," he had explained, "if your backers think they do I'll give it to 'em. Only they ought to know, you know, that for a start in a new place old Ibsen's a pretty stiffish proposition. Sometimes people 'll swallow him, mostly they won't. Which means they don't want us back again—see?"

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Johnstone did see.

"I'm not keen myself," he said. "I'd like to see Kitty in the *Bush Girl*. Only the point is, this old Society of ours is all on the 'higher' tack."

"I know," said Mr. Foote, lugubriously.

"Of course," said Johnstone, "they'd probably enjoy anything, but they think it's their duty to get improved as much as possible for their money. *Ghosts*—don't you know?"

"*Ghosts* aren't Revenants," said Mr. Foote; "still it can't be helped."

"You might talk 'em out of it," suggested Johnstone.

"I'll try," said Mr. Foote. But when he saw Miss Atkey the chances that his efforts might succeed had seemed small, and he had taken the line of the least resistance. He did not know that in Mr. Mills's pocket lay a powerful advocate for the less high forms of the drama, and he proceeded—after replying "Quite" to Miss Atkey's remark that "Art without sacrifice was nothing worth."

"I take it, then, that you want the serious drama only. *Ghosts* has been mentioned to me."

"Yes," said Miss Atkey.

"I can give you a *Ghosts* that you'll like," said Mr. Foote. "It's not cheering, of course. I've known ladies so haunted by it that they've had a breakdown afterward. It's a strong thing."

"It's so strong," said Mr. Mills, who was by

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this time in the state of a martyr who, having got himself tied to the stake, must cry out, though he will not recant—"it's so strong—that I—I—Ought we to begin with it?"

"Hullo!" said young Johnstone, involuntarily.

"Is it not our duty," went on Mr. Mills, "to— to consider our weaker members?" He was aware that all eyes were turned upon him, but he was too desperate to mind. "I think it is."

"Query?" said Miss Atkey, and all seemed lost. But unexpectedly Mr. Watherstone who had been admitted to the séance as host, came to the rescue.

"I rather agree with Mr. Mills," he said. "*Ghosts* is a very unpleasant play. It's full of merits. But I fancy people here would simply walk out of the theatre if we had it."

Mr. Watherstone was in no sense of the Heights, and ordinarily Mr. Mills would have scorned his assistance. But he could not help feeling grateful now, especially as Miss Atkey intransigently remarked, "Let them walk out," and Mrs. Watherstone, who had not read *Ghosts*, but was sure that Mr. Watherstone had taken the vulgar view, added:

"Besides, is it fair to ask an artist like Mr. Foote to defer to the lower tastes among us? I think not."

Mr. Foote bowed gallantly.

"Ah, madam, if all were like you," he said. "They are not. I know it to my cost. They are not ready for us. Ibsen frightens them. It is

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the same with Shaw. His finest things have been censored."

"Why not have *You Never Can Tell*?" asked Mr. Watherstone, again interfering. "I'm no judge, but I should call that a capital farce. Why shouldn't we have a farce? What say you, Johnstone?"

That young man took a glance at the disapproving faces of Miss Atkey and Mrs. Watherstone, and at the faltering lineaments of Mr. Jernyngham Mills.

"Well, Mr. Watherstone," he said, "if you ask me, I think the ladies are right. Ibsen's great, as Mr. Mills showed us in his paper."

Mr. Mills half rose, but sat down again.

"And I doubt if a farce is quite up to the Society's ideas. At the same time—as Mr. Mills says—we mustn't consider ourselves alone. That's why I should favor starting with a compromise. There was a good comedy"—Johnstone turned to Mr. Foote as he spoke—"that you played at Deeds——"

"The *Bush Girl*," said Mr. Foote.

"A serious comedy, I presume," demanded Miss Atkey, "not one of those musical vulgarities?"

"Not a bit—not a bit," said Johnstone. "There is some music, incidentally, but—high class, and the whole thing is serious from—from the Imperial standpoint."

"Quite. It's a good popular thing," said Mr.

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Foot. "And there are no second meanings in it even if you try." He met the glare of Miss Atkey's eyeglasses as he spoke, and hastily added, "Some people always do, you know."

"I regret to hear it," said Miss Atkey. "I have always disliked puns, if that is what you mean."

"My God!" said Mr. Foot, as he was taken away later by young Johnstone, after a prolonged discussion in which the *Bush Girl* had been agreed to and a date had been fixed for the inauguration in Port Allington of the drama—"my God, what a Lady Macbeth she would make if only Lady Macbeth had been a thin spinster! Give me a drink, old man, and tell me just which spot round about the Ark landed on."

"Don't you laugh at Port Allington," said Johnstone. "If you play up for all you're worth next week, you'll find we are jolly good supporters of the drama. Better than Deeds."

This looked not unlike a true prophecy on the evening, a week later, when the Institute was filled, every seat of it, at least twenty minutes before the curtain was timed to rise on the *Bush Girl*. The Literary and Philosophic Society was there in force, and, as Miss Atkey remarked, not without bitterness, you could hardly have told them from the rest, so childishly expectant did they look.

"Scarcely," she said, "the spirit in which one

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would have pictured our intellectuals awaiting a criticism of life."

"But I'm told," said Mrs. Bossington, who was far too excited to listen, "that it's very amusing."

"Amusing!" Miss Atkey's scorn was so concentrated that Mrs. Bossington came to attention and suggested soothingly that there would be a lesson behind it all, no doubt.

"I believe you are as vacuous as any of them," said Miss Atkey, and glanced contemptuously at Agatha Mills, who sat just in front of her, with Mr. Webstone on one side and Mrs. Mills on the other. Mr. Mills sat on the outside, feeling and looking anxious. He was wondering what his wife would think of it. When he had confessed to her that Ibsen had been given up and a modern comedy was to be played which he feared would be commonplace and vulgar, he had hoped that she would not come to it. But it seemed that she would, woman-like.

"I feel, Jernyngham," she had said, "that as you have given up your first idea and realized your responsibility toward Agatha—I wish to show that I can trust you."

Would she be shocked? Mr. Mills sat in cold terror, expecting it for at least half an hour. The rise of the curtain found his heart in his mouth. For five minutes Port Allington preserved toward the drama a suspicious silence. Then a comic detective appeared. After that Mr. Mills had no



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cause to be solicitous. Port Allington surrendered itself whole-heartedly. There were things that shocked Mr. Mills himself at intervals—a brevity of skirt here, a levity of motive there; but they did not shock Port Allington or Mrs. and Miss Mills. They laughed as Mr. Mills had never heard them laugh before, and they brought out their handkerchiefs, too, at the pathetic parts. Immediately behind Mr. Mills, Mrs. Bossington's sniffs were almost trying. Only Miss Atkey sat erect, immobile—she alone of all the audience there assembled. For even Mr. Mills himself laughed once by accident, though he sobered down at once, and was silent on the drive home while Mrs. Mills and Agatha chatted.

"If that is the drama," said Mrs. Mills, "I think it is a great deal less harmful than people say. What did you think of it, Agatha?"

"Oh, it was lovely," said Miss Mills. "How splendid Mr. Foote was!"

"And the Bush Girl was very nice too, I thought," said Mrs. Mills.

"Oh, sweet," said Agatha. "And what a lovely voice she had!"

"Yes; but I'm not at all sure," said Mrs. Mills, with maternal pride, "that you couldn't sing some of her songs almost as prettily yourself, Agatha. What was that one about Mairi?"

They had just arrived and Mr. Mills was unlocking the front door for them. As he turned on

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the light, and they entered the hall, Agatha began to sing that beautiful song that had brought down the house. She had a clear high soprano voice, and it rang artlessly to Mr. Mills's rafters:

"I'm a Mair-i!

I've got a rare eye

For Spotting where the Paint's worn Thin!"

Instinctively as she sang she pulled up her skirts a little and tripped about the hall.

"That's it," said Mrs. Mills. "How clever the child is, Jernyngham! She does it quite as naturally as Miss What's-her-name."

Mr. Jernyngham Mills groaned.

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### I

**E**VERYONE in Port Allington remembers the garden party which Mrs. Upton James gave to celebrate the arrival of her husband's new pupil, Paul Barker. Mrs. James had written 'Croquet' on her invitation cards, but as she never gave a croquet party except when a new pupil arrived, people justly inferred that a new pupil would be on view. It was both courteous and tactful of Mrs. James to show him, partly because the interest always taken in a new comer to Port Allington was considerable, partly because if leading residents like Mrs. Watherstone, Mrs. Bossington, Miss Tindal Atkey, the Mills and so on, liked the pupil's looks, they were certain in return to make him free of any of the little entertainments they might themselves be getting up, and this would help to pass the pupil's time in a pleasant manner.

More interest than usual was taken in the party, because it was a particularly long time since the Rev. Upton James had had a pupil. Mrs. Bossington, who walked over to the Jameses with Miss Atkey, calculated on the way that it must be fully eighteen months.

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"It is strange," she proceeded, having worked this sum out, "that Mr. James cannot get more pupils."

"He only accepts a limited number," Miss Atkey reminded her. She quoted Mr. James's brief but dignified advertisement which, appearing at intervals in the *Church Times*, gave Mr. James almost a journalistic reputation among the ladies of Port Allington. But Mrs. Bossington stuck to her point.

"Oh, I know it says that only a limited number of the sons of gentlemen are accepted as pupils, but one in two years seems so very limited."

"Possibly."

"And it is a misfortune, both for the pupils, who might be prepared for their entrance examinations, and for the Jameses, who want the money. I wonder if Mr. James is a little too aloof."

"Aloof?" Miss Atkey challenged the word.

"Austere," explained Mrs. Bossington. "Lacking in gaiety."

"Surely," said Miss Atkey, "gaiety is hardly one of the subjects in which candidates for the University and public schools are examined. I should have said that Mr. James was a most stimulating companion for a thoughtful boy."

"But so many boys," persisted Mrs. Bossington, "are not thoughtful, nor do they appreciate thought in others. There was that rather short stout boy

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they had—Albert Graveson—I invited him to tea once.”

“So did I,” said Miss Atkey. “A great reader. He read aloud to me after tea I remember.”

“Did he offer to do it?” asked Mrs. Bossington.

“He fell in very readily with my suggestion,” said Miss Atkey.

“When he came to me,” said Mrs. Bossington, “he was most depressed. At first he would say nothing, but he ate a good deal, and afterwards he said that he found Port Allington dull, and that Mrs. James looked after him too much. She had made him bring his overcoat with him to me, in case the wind should turn to the north. He disliked that. And he said that he was always being given medicines to ward off colds.”

“I think that you must have encouraged him to grumble,” said Miss Atkey.

“I didn’t,” protested Mrs. Bossington, “I tried to make him see how grateful he ought to be to Mrs. James, but he either would not or could not. It was constantly being looked after that he disliked, and there must be something in it because—you remember that other boy, Fredrick Cole?”

Miss Atkey remembered well enough but she did not admit it; it was neither usual nor pleasant for her to be worsted in argument by Mrs. Bossington. Fredrick Cole had been a particularly bright pupil who had been expected by Mrs. James actually to gain a scholarship at one of the Universities.

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A fortnight before the date of the examination, as he afterwards admitted, he had begun to feel unwell. But not until two days before had he spoken about it. When Dr. Dillingbury was called in, he found him with congestion of the lungs, and unable, of course, even to go in for the examination. Charged by Mrs. James with concealing his plight in the earlier stages, Fredrick Cole had sulkily confessed that he had hidden it because he hated to be cosseted.

"Mrs. James told me about it herself," mused Mrs. Bossington, "she was greatly upset."

"I think the boy Cole exaggerated Mrs. James's solicitude, and so do you," said Miss Atkey, but she rather guiltily shifted further under her arm a little brown paper parcel she was carrying. The parcel contained a pot of bullace cheese, which Miss Atkey was taking to Mrs. James by request. Mrs. James had written to her only the day before, saying that she been foolish enough to run out of bullace cheese, which was so splendid for sore throats, and could Miss Atkey exchange a pot for bramble jelly? "I hate to be out of bullace cheese," Mrs. James had written, "especially as our new pupil, Paul, comes from a warmer climate and is almost certain to feel our air." Miss Atkey had been afraid that Mrs. James would remember about it when they got to the house, and the production of the pot would fortify Mrs. Bossington, who could be very obstinate at times, in her opinion;

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but luckily Mrs. James was far too flustered; and Miss Atkey was able to put it down beside the umbrella-stand without attention being called to it. It seemed that the real reason for Mrs. James's extra flurry of manner was that Paul had not yet arrived.

"We expected him yesterday morning," she explained as she ushered Miss Atkey and Mrs. Bossington into the garden. "Only, I suppose, poor boy, his boat was delayed in crossing. We were dreadfully anxious. Supposing there had been a storm and possibly a shipwreck. I wanted Mr. James to go to Liverpool and find out. But luckily we got a telegram, explaining that he was coming on to-day."

"Did he explain why he is coming on to-day?" asked Miss Atkey.

"No, he didn't do that exactly," said Mrs. James. "It is so difficult to explain in a telegram, isn't it? I daresay he was feeling upset by the voyage. We shall have to put him on a simple diet. Luckily—oh, there is Mrs. Watherstone! How very nice of you to come! And Mr. and Mrs. Mills . . . Agatha too! Paul has not arrived yet. So disappointing, isn't it? But he comes by the 4 o'clock train. Mr. James is meeting him. They should be here in a very few minutes now. How do you do, Mrs. Jenkinson?"

The little lady trotted from guest to guest, shaking hands and making explanations as lucidly

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as her excitement permitted her to. She arranged for six or seven people to start a game of croquet at once, urging those who did not play and did not want to play to make up a game, and preventing those who wished to do so from being able to. One of the hoops was missing, and the red ball had such a large piece out of it that it could hardly be said to roll at all, but it was not the first time that Mrs. James had given a croquet party, and matters soon arranged themselves, and Mrs. James was able for a moment to sit down in a chair, and explain to Mrs. Watherstone, who was, perhaps, her most important guest, all details about the new pupil which she had yet omitted to mention.

"He really comes to us," she said, "through Mr. Clevedon. You remember Harry Clevedon, Mr. Clevedon's son, was with us for three months and Mr. James prepared him for Rafton School. Mr. Clevedon himself was at Rafton in his time, and so it seems was Mr. Barker. He and Mr. Clevedon were school friends together."

"Who is Mr. Barker?" asked Mrs. Watherstone, anxious to get the story right.

"Oh, he is Paul's father," said Mrs. James, "and he has a large business in Jamaica. I do not know what the business is but Mr. Clevedon said that Mr. Barker must be a very wealthy man, and though he had not seen him for twenty years, he felt sure that any son of his would be a gentlemanly young fellow. Mr. Barker had written to



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Mr. Clevedon asking if he knew of any tutors where his boy could be prepared for Cambridge, and of course Mr. Clevedon at once thought of us. Paul is seventeen, and his father thinks that two years' hard work should make him ready for Cambridge. I am afraid that he is perhaps a little idle."

"Did his Father say so?" asked Mrs. Watherstone.

"He hinted it," said Mrs. James. "A little too inclined for amusement, he wrote. I daresay it is only the climate of Jamaica. Mr. Barker seemed to suggest that himself. He wanted a quiet home for Paul in a town where there were not too many distractions. Of course Port Allington is just the place. A little croquet now and then perhaps, and if we may bring him occasionally to the meetings of the Literary and Philosophical Society?"

"I feel sure the Society will be delighted to welcome him," replied Mrs. Watherstone graciously. She was president and founder of the Society, which also met in her house, and owed everything to her including the refreshments.

"Thank you, so much," said Mrs. James. "Now . . . can that be my husband and Paul?"

It turned out on the contrary that the carriage driving up contained Mr. Webstone. Mrs. James had been rather doubtful about inviting him, because though everybody who was anybody in Port Allington knew him and liked him in spite of them-

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selves, you never knew if he was quite the right sort of old gentleman to have at a party. He said the most outspoken things, and rumour had it that as a young man he had been very wild and adventurous. However he had come, and Mrs. James, though she was secretly wondering if Paul's father would have approved of him, had to say that she was delighted to see him.

"That's very kind of you," said Mr. Webstone. "I thought I must look in and see you and the new pupil—eh?"

"Oh, of course. Paul Barker is his name," began Mrs. James.

"Irish family?" asked Mr. Webstone.

"I hardly know," said Mrs. James. "Mr. Barker—his father—" she entered into the explanation she had already given to the other guests, and Mr. Webstone nodded his head sagely.

"Stopped the night at Liverpool, did he? You think he was upset after the voyage? H'm, he looked pretty hearty at the station, I thought."

"You don't mean to say you have seen him?" asked Mrs. James excitedly.

"Well, I saw a tall young fellow with James at the station. Looking out the luggage, you know. Thought he might be the new pupil. But I didn't wait. I knew you'd be taken up with him as soon as he arrived so I hurried along to pay my call first."

"It was very nice of you," said Mrs. James.

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"Not at all," said Mr. Webstone. "There's their cab coming now. Is that Miss Tindale Atkey over there? I must go and have a chat with Miss Atkey."

Miss Atkey never could quite approve of Mr. Webstone. She found in him the fault of levity, and an inability to understand that all other people were not similarly minded. With the contradictiousness of human nature, Mr. Webstone always seemed to enjoy a chat with Miss Atkey. He made his bow to her just as she, with Mrs. Bossington, was quite unostentatiously moving towards the front part of the garden in order to command a view of the new pupil.

"Mrs. James ought to have put up seats," began Mr. Webstone, "so that everyone could see at once."

"See what?" asked Miss Atkey.

"The new pupil," said Mr. Webstone.

"Mrs. Bossington and I," explained Miss Atkey with dignity, "were wondering where Mrs. James had planted her clove carnations."

"Here he comes," said Mr. Webstone, and, in spite of themselves, Miss Atkey and Mrs. Bossington, and indeed several of the other guests who were possibly also looking for the clove carnations, turned to gaze. The Rev. Upton James and Paul were advancing together into the garden. Mr. James's tall, spare, slightly bowed figure was familiar to all, and there was nothing remarkable

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about it, unless it was somewhat more bowed than usual. It was Paul Barker who attracted all eyes. He was a tall and well-made youth with a jaunty walk and extremely fashionable clothes. They were almost startlingly fashionable—certainly for Port Allington—and would have startled people, if their wearer himself had not been still more startling. Mr. James's previous pupils had all been boys—boys of varying ages—but unmistakably English boys, who would have been distinctly shy to be marched straight into the middle of a garden party. Paul did not appear in the least shy, and he was unmistakably not English. He walked on grinning and showing his teeth in the brightest manner to where Mrs. James, visibly trembling, stood waiting for him.

"Now let's see if we can find those carnations," said Mr. Webstone, and his voice was a sort of signal for the Port Allington ladies to recollect their manners and cease staring. Mrs. Bossington and Miss Atkey followed him almost eagerly to a more retired part of the garden, and it was only when they got there that Mrs. Bossington was able to relieve her feelings——

"But—but," she stammered, "he's exceedingly dark."

"Dark!" repeated Mr. Webstone. "He's a nigger."

"Surely not!" said Miss Atkey.

"A woolley nigger," said Mr. Webstone. "I

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thought I'd come along and see how Port Allington received him. As soon as I spied him on the platform I guessed that James had been let in. Of course you can see how—from Mrs. James's story. Paul Barker, English enough name. Father at a public school with another pupil's father. Sounded all right—eh—even if the father did live in the West Indies?"

"I cannot understand it," Mrs. Bossington confessed; ignoring Miss Atkey's signals to discontinue the conversation.

"Can't you?" said Mr. Webstone joyfully. "It's very simple. Barker senior goes out to the West Indies—sees a smart looking dark girl—gad, they know the whole bag of tricks, you know——"

"Yes, yes . . . I mean no, I don't know."

Mrs. Bossington's innocent eagerness scandalised Miss Atkey, who had a vague premonition of what was coming.

"Of course you don't," said old Mr. Webstone with cheery courtesy. "I daresay Barker didn't, either. And he didn't expect a full blown woolly-haired son, but he got one."

"Really," broke in Miss Atkey most frostily, "that—that——."

"I know what you mean," Mr. Webstone availed himself of her hesitation, "you don't think it follows that Barker père ought not to have deceived James? Nor do I. James ought to send the nigger back."

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"I meant nothing of the kind," replied Miss Atkey, driven by her dislike of the old gentleman's coarseness into a defence of Paul. "I think on the contrary that we are all brothers and sisters. I believe that to be Mr. James's opinion too. He certainly has preached a sermon on the brotherhood of nations to that effect, and I believe he will live up to it. I myself shall certainly ask Paul to tea."

"Oh yes," said Mrs. Bossington.

Mr. Webstone made a wry face at them.

"If that's what you ladies are going to do," he said, "I should advise you to copy the South African ladies, and have a revolver handy."

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Mrs. Bossington.

"I'll lend Miss Atkey mine," declared Mr. Webstone. "The offer stands. Shall we go and have another look at Paul first?"

"Certainly not," said Miss Atkey, conscious of an unwonted flush upon her cheeks. "I wish neither to malign nor to stare at this poor boy."

But Mrs. Bossington, ever weak-minded, could not refrain from accompanying the old gentleman back to the croquet lawn. Agatha Mills was performing there with great skill, among other players. Paul was looking on with Mr. Mills. He obviously did not realise that Mr. Mills was Agatha's father, for Mrs. Bossington heard him say in a confidential but clear voice—"That is a very pretty girl. By Scott, I shall make up to that girl. She is pale,

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but if there are more girls as pretty as that in Port Allington I shall like it very well here for a bit."

"Er—that is my daughter," replied Mr. Mills stiffly.

The stiffness did not seem to ruffle Paul's good humour.

"I congratulate you," he said with a gleaming smile. "Try one of my cigarettes, will you?"

Mr. Mills declined and Mrs. Bossington saw disapproving glances on the faces of several of the ladies present. It was not considered nice at Port Allington to smoke at garden parties; nor had any of Mr. James's pupils ever smoked before. Mrs. James, in a twitter at the other side of the lawn, did not seem to notice that Paul was smoking. He was certainly a new kind of pupil altogether, and Mrs. Bossington wondered if Mr. Webstone could be right about him, and what other people were thinking, and whether they would invite him out or not. She decided that if she asked him to tea, she would arrange to have a plumber or somebody of that sort in the house at the time. It would enable her to extend her hospitality without risk of frightening either of her maids.

## II

Most Port Allingtonians found themselves at some time or other in old Doctor Dillingbury's consulting room. Some people thought him old-

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fashioned: not very good at diagnosing out of the way and subtle maladies, and slow to experiment with new-fangled diets. But they admitted that he understood patients with normal complaints better than the young doctors who had from time to time invaded the town and tried to set up a practice there. The young doctors made the mistake of supposing that everybody preferred a cure, however unpleasant, to an affliction which, as in the case of Mrs. Featherston's eczema or the insomnia from which poor Mrs. Portman suffered, though it might be so aggravated at times as to need professional attendance, was on the whole not only endurable, but even stimulating, since it gave the sufferer something to think of and to discuss with her friends. Dr. Dillingbury, without encouraging his patients to make too much of their ailments, recognised this aspect of them, and seemed to think that in many cases a brisk and cheerful word of encouragement was better than a solemn lecture or a rigorous treatment which could only be effective if patients really needed to be in health. In straightforward emergencies no one could be prompter or more helpful; and he was always full of hope and cheery to the last. One lady had even gone so far as to say that she would rather die in the cheerful atmosphere diffused by old Dr. Dillingbury than linger on in charge of some of these alarming young practitioners who only regarded you as an interesting case.

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Mr. Webstone was bound for Dr. Dillingbury's one evening about a fortnight after the croquet party. He had to go occasionally. Nobody knew what was the matter with Mr. Webstone, except Mr. Webstone himself and Dr. Dillingbury, and they perhaps knew too well, and liked each other for the cheery way each carried his knowledge. A great many people in similar circumstances would have been thinking about nothing but the state of their health, but Mr. Webstone preferred to look about him, and notice things and people along the road. Human beings had the same interest for him as birds have for ornithologists—perhaps more. It was not due to these somewhat unusual habits of observation that, when he got as far as Allington Avenue, he noticed a considerable commotion going on about halfway down it. Anybody else who had happened to be passing at the time could hardly have failed both to see and to hear it. The small errand boy who was struggling somewhat ineffectively in the grip of his tall assailant was rending the air with his yells, which renewed themselves with every fresh bash that his head received. Mr. Webstone, advancing at his best pace upon this unequal fray, found that the tall person was Mr. James's new pupil, Paul Barker. He promptly dug Paul in the ribs with his walking stick; thereby causing him, partly from the pain, partly from the surprise, for he had not apparently seen Mr. Webstone advancing, to drop the small boy, who swiftly retired to the other side of the road and began to

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dab his face with his handkerchief. Paul himself wheeled round upon Mr. Webstone with the whites of his eyes and his teeth showing. Mr. Webstone at once administered a second poke in the ribs with his walking stick.

"Now, now," he said, "what are you doing? You mustn't go killing small boys in the public streets, you know."

"He called me names," growled Paul, rubbing his ribs, but apparently deterred by Mr. Webstone's affably calm manner from running amok against the old gentleman.

"Names—what sort of names?"

"I didn't," sang out the small boy, tearful but defiant on the other side of the road.

"He lies," snarled Paul.

"I'm not," retorted the small boy. "I was a-singing to myself."

"What were you singing?" demanded Mr. Webstone.

A damp grin spread over the boy's injured face and he licked his lips joyfully—

"I was a-singin

"'Blacky, Blacky Beedle,  
Stick 'im on a needle'—"

it's a song what I've heard, and why shouldn't I sing it without 'im coming at me and trying to do me in? See if I don't tell me Father!"

"I will kill you and your Father," exclaimed Paul hotly.

"No, you won't. It's illegal," said Mr. Web-

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stone. "Besides, I can't have it. It would disturb me when I am out for a walk to see the bodies of children lying about. You mustn't mind what they sing. Small boys always try to annoy people, but people ought not to be annoyed. Don't let me catch you at it again, or I shall hand you over to a policeman."

Paul muttered something under his breath, at which Mr. Webstone, feinting with his stick, ordered him to be off back to Mr. James. Paul departed, with the white of his teeth still showing, and Mr. Webstone, having admonished the small boy not to sing songs commenting upon people's complexions, both because it was unkind, and because dark people, when angry, were quite capable of eating boys, walked slowly on. He saw that Paul had become rather more of a problem than he had expected. Already there were stories about him, as Mr. Webstone knew which showed that in a small Western town like Port Allington he was out of place. It seemed that he was fond of fire-water which he was in the habit of obtaining at one of the taverns by the waterside. His statement to Mr. Mills that Port Allington would suit him if there were more girls as pretty as Agatha there, was in process of being verified. One or two maid servants had been frightened by him in the streets. Of course the Jameses had heard nothing of these things, and would be the very last people to believe them if they did hear them.

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That they would give anything to be rid of Paul—which was the condition, Mr. Webstone was sure, at which they had already instinctively arrived—was, and would be, with them, only a reason the more for not getting rid of him unjustly. The problem of Paul had to be solved without them; and Mr. Webstone, having got his own business over at Dr. Dillingbury's, broached the subject to one whom he knew would be a sympathetic spirit.

"It's not my business," he said, "but the sooner that young African goes, the better for the Jameses and Port Allington generally. He's getting on the Jameses' nerves badly. As you know, Mrs. James's ideal pupil is some small boy whom she can mollicoddle and James's is one that can cram the classics with some ease. This young nigger is all that most offends them, and that they are least capable of dealing with——"

"But I suppose that won't influence them to get rid of him?" asked the old doctor.

"Quite the reverse. Coloured brother. Great opportunity of imparting culture to a woolly heathen. They'll never get rid of him till he's committed a police court sin. Meanwhile James's reputation as a coach is being ruined—in this neighbourhood at any rate. Mills thinks it a disgrace that the African should be loose in the town, having seen him roll his eyes at Agatha. Mrs. Bossington's tea was a failure. I believe he pro-

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duced portraits of actresses for Miss Atkey's inspection——"

Dr. Dillingbury chuckled.

"If he turns up at the Literary and Philosophical Society," continued Mr. Webstone, "there will be a historic scene, and Mrs. Watherstone will never forgive the Jameses."

"What do you propose to do?" enquired Dr. Dillingbury.

"I am the only person without a reputation in this town," said Mr. Webstone, "and I propose to play the bad Samaritan—with your assistance.

"I don't know what you mean," said Dr. Dillingbury, lighting a cigar, "and I must not be drawn into a conspiracy."

"You will be drawn into it by accident," replied Mr. Webstone. "So shall I—on the surface. But the success of the plan . . . which I have hatched since I saw our African friend beating in the head of a small boy in Allington Avenue, will depend upon your happening to be at the Jameses between six and seven o'clock to-morrow evening. I don't like to prophesy, but I think I shall turn up with Paul in a cab.

### III

It was Mr. James's rule, in the Summer time, to allow his pupils, when he had any, to break off work at four o'clock in the afternoon, and enjoy the hours from then until dinner time in play.

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Often the pupils would be invited out to tea and croquet, or to some other diversion. If they had no invitation, a game was usually open to them with Mr. James in the Vicarage garden, or else a brisk walk, having for its object some curious and interesting spot in the neighbourhood. Himself a learned local antiquarian, Mr. James had planned quite a number of such walks, in which some Tumuli, or the Norman arch of a church, or the site of a camp of a Roman legion figured as attractions. Several young pupils in times past had imbibed a considerable knowledge of the history of their country from these walks, and at the same time benefitted physically by the open air and exercise.

Paul had already been sent for several of them. Invitations to tea had not flowed in upon him; and inasmuch, also, as he displayed little aptitude for croquet, being easily beaten by Mr. James, a short-sighted 15 bisquer, and showed his teeth unsmilingly when so beaten, the walks had become almost a daily institution. It is true that Paul on his return from them proved himself to be unobservant to a degree unparalleled in Mr. James's experience; frequently not seeming to know if he had reached the Tumulus or the Norman arch, or whatever it might be; or—if he did appear to have reached it (and one had to deduce this from his ever-fanciful descriptions of the road) being firmly persuaded that a Tumulus was the opening into an

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early Christian church and that a Norman arch led directly to the cantonments of the Romans. Nor was his temper improved, as a rule, by the walks. He came back either exceedingly dulled or sulky or irritable.

Since irritability, however, barely expresses the state to which he had usually reduced his tutor before starting out, the latter was only too glad to see Paul headed for the open country. The air could at least do the young man no harm, while his absence for some hours made it just possible to face the idea of having him back again. Perhaps it would be truer to say that it had hitherto made the idea possible, but such was the state of exasperation to which Mr. James had been brought, as it happened, the day following Mr. Webstone's interview with Dr. Dillingbury, that he allowed his mind to dwell on the thought of getting rid of Paul. What is more, he broached the subject to Mrs. James.

"I do not think we can keep this youth any longer," he said almost brusquely, for he had sought out Mrs. James while his blood was still up, knowing perhaps by instinct that that good woman could only be pitiless towards others if she thought her husband was profoundly suffering at their hands.

"Why not, my dear?" asked Mrs. James, agitated, but prepared to be conscientious as she always was.

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"He is not," answered Mr. James, "the sort of pupil we either expected or wanted."

Mrs. James closed her eyes slightly, as though to shut out some unwontedly hard aspect of Mr. James, and said, "You mean, my dear?"

"I mean that he is a young negro."

"But surely," urged Mrs. James, "that is not his fault. And are we not lead to believe that the author of the Acts of the Apostles was swarthy?"

Mr. James groaned. He had not suffered enough, it seemed, to make his wife side with him. He made another effort, nevertheless. "There are degrees of colour," he said. "I deprecate your analogy. The case is simply this—that this youth has got on your nerves and is getting on mine. We cannot afford it, and I do not see why we should try."

"What I ask," replied Mrs. James gently, "is—would the dismissal of Paul be quite in keeping with the words of the sermon you preached last Quinquagesima Sunday?"

The sermon in question was one preached on behalf of African and other missions. It represented that, though all might not feel themselves called to the mission field, yet each could do something for his coloured brother. It denounced, as Mr. James bitterly remembered, the inhumane view that the darker races are inferior to the white ones. Again he groaned.

"This is obviously not a question of mission



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work," he said. "We are not condemning Paul to outer darkness if we advise Mr. Barker to look out for some other tutor."

"It is only for a definite sin that you would expel a perfectly white pupil," Mrs. James reminded him.

Mr. James rushed from the room.

Meanwhile, Paul pursued his road—not to the alleged site of the camp of the eleventh legion, five miles distant, but to that closer and—in Paul's opinion—far more interesting spot—the bar parlour of the Three Mariners. It was the tavern which, after a good deal of experiment in various directions, he had found most to his taste. It adjoined the quays at which big ships used to lie in the old days before the river was silted up; and the landlord was a talkative, friendly old man who realised that Paul was a gentleman and a man of the world. There was also a barmaid at the Three Mariners, with hair more golden than Miss Agatha Mills', and Paul was devoted to her. At first she had seemed to prefer two smart commercial travellers with red faces, who spent longer in the bar parlour than Paul did; but the day before, after he had told her of his great wealth and importance in Jamaica, she had given him to understand that they were, comparatively, nothing to her. She was out when he arrived, but she came in after he had had six or seven whiskies, and Paul sat with his arm round her and had more whiskies. After that

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again the old gentleman, who had dug Paul in the ribs the day before, came in, and the barmaid went out of the room, and Paul, not liking Mr. Webstone's face, tried to banish it by drinking still more whiskey. He only vaguely heard the conversation between the landlord and Mr. Webstone, and did not understand a word of it. As a matter of fact, the landlord, who knew Mr. Webstone, said—

"I can't help the young gentleman coming here, sir. He hasn't had only the one glass."

The bar was empty except for the three of them, but if anybody else had been present, he might have supposed that Mr. Webstone was going to dig the landlord in the ribs with his stick. He only tapped him with it however and said—"He's been seen coming out partly drunk more than once. You don't want to lose your license, I suppose?"

The landlord instantly became abject and said he didn't.

"Very well," continued Mr. Webstone, "go outside and hold my carriage door open. I'll bring the boy out in a moment and drive him back."

The landlord went out and Mr. Webstone sat down on the bench opposite Paul.

"What are you thinking of?" he asked.

Paul was speechless. He glowered slightly.

"Ju-ju sacrifices?" queried Mr. Webstone. "Torchlit orgies in forests that have never seen the sun? Dusky devilries . . . or the beauties of the white man's civilisation? Heaven knows,

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my unfortunate young African, what sort of thoughts pass through a mixed brain like yours when the firewater's mounted there. I am very sorry for you, and ashamed of myself and my fellow-countrymen. But the practical question is—are you drunk?"

Paul stared.

"I should say," emended Mr. Webstone, "are you drunk enough?"

Paul said something that might have been construed into a statement that he was not drunk.

"In that case," went on Mr. Webstone, "I am in a quandry. I want you to be drunk all the way back, and even for a few minutes longer." He rose to his feet. "I suppose like Nelson and other great men," he said, speaking more to himself than he had hitherto done, "that I must disobey to win. I don't know the solution of the general problem this negro represents, but I do know the solution of the particular one. He has to go. I saw from the first that he was one of the kind who wouldn't do here."

Slowly he walked across to the bar where a half empty bottle of whiskey stood, picked it up, returned and filled Paul's glass.

"Have a good drink of that," he said very kindly, "and then come along back with me . . ."

Paul kept quiet in the carriage but the short walk up the James's garden to the house made him feel merry, and he was singing blithely when

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he entered it. Mr. Webstone explained briefly where he had found him, and Dr. Dillingbury, who happened to have come over for a chat with Mr. James, certified him to be intoxicated.

Very shortly afterwards Paul Barker left Port Allington—a relief to Miss Atkey who, despite her experience of him at Mrs. Bossington's, had decided that it was her duty to ask him to tea at least once.

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**T**HE peace that comes upon one in the jungle, when one has finished lunch after a long morning's ride, can be very great at times, and it was that afternoon. From the bamboo patch at our back doves cooed incessantly. A hornbill, whose tiny wings, that never ceased flapping, drove along its lean body and great bill with difficulty, had just flown in from a grove rather more distant, nearly tilting over at the surprise of seeing us. In front ran a river, wide and very shallow, but flowing smooth and silvery as these Bihar rivers do for all their want of depth. A pair of stilts were picking their way delicately along the edges of the sandbanks—as delicately indeed as if they walked on hot iron, to which the sand bore a resemblance. Occasionally they waded in to cool their toes. On the opposite bank tall spear-grass grew and spread to the horizon, but along the slope of the bank, between the grass and the river, I could just see the form of a crocodile, stretched head downwards at an angle of  $45^{\circ}$ , ready to plunge in when his dreams of fish became later a pressing appetite. I knew—for I had been in this part before—that every fifty yards or so along both banks his counterpart might be found—every

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one basking on his own special beat just above the teeming river. Yet not a splash or a sound was to be heard from it, and, except for the cooing doves and the paddling stilts and ourselves, the whole country might have been asleep.

The collector, as he leant back against the tree under which we had eaten and drunk, and drew the first flavour of his cheroot, voiced the peacefulness of the scene by saying—"It's not bad here, is it?"

"Perfect," I responded.

"It's thanks to our having got rid of the sub-deputy," he said; and went on with quiet satisfaction: "He cannot possibly catch us up until this evening. Rather cute of me to mount him on that elephant."

"Very cute indeed," I agreed.

"The result is," said the collector, "that we not only don't have him with us, but that he's prevented from writing reports. It is impossible to write reports on the pad of an elephant."

"I certainly couldn't," I replied. "But hadn't you better touch wood?"

"Why?" demanded the collector.

"There's somebody running in this direction now. Look!" I pointed to a native who was coming towards us, along the road we had travelled that morning, at a slow trot. It came into my mind that this was the same road along which the sub-deputy collector was travelling on his elephant. It must have come into the collector's mind

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too, for he said without any certainty in his voice——

“He can't be from the sub-deputy. It's probably some local petitioner.”

“We shall know in a minute,” I said. “Here he is.”

The collector snorted something in the vernacular at the youth, who had arrived and was salaaming before him in the ceremonial jungly manner, in response to which the youth, whose bare chest was still heaving from the long run he had evidently had, produced out of his waistband a large sheaf of foolscap paper tied into a bundle. I did not require the collector's groan to inform me that the impossible had happened!

“Talk of the sub-deputy,” he said, as he stretched out his hand for the packet. “Of course it's from him, and of course I shall have to read it. This boy says he's got into some sort of mess somewhere. Mostly imaginary, I expect—still——”

He drew his back up against the trunk of the tree, so that he might deal more strenuously with the pages reporting the sub-deputy's predicament, while I lay back and recalled to my mind's eye the form and character of that winning official. We both, I think, liked the sub-deputy collector. I certainly did. He had furnished me with copy before now. He was a Bengali—a vast young man in every way. In figure he was a balloon surmounted by a white solar topee and ending in a

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pair of white riding-breeches (not that he ever rode, or that any pony could have supported him). The spirit within him was not unlike a balloon either. It rose and sank and swayed with every wind that blew. Only, the balloon image can give no impression of the earnestness, the indefatigability, the mixture of irrepressible self-importance and overwhelming humility, or the amiable un-snubbable desire to do the right thing in the wrong way that characterised the sub-deputy collector. The collector loved him a little less than I did because, whereas, being unofficial, I could simply enjoy him, the collector had to employ him as on his present tour of inspection, and suffered in consequence. His great weakness was in writing 'Notes'—indistinguishably mixed in value, and then sending them in to the collector to read—volumes of them. When you are camping out in very hot weather, you do not wish nightly to read through fifteen pages of encyclopedic notes—mostly spun from the brain of an exceedingly stout young man, when three lines of facts are what you are looking for. He had been out three days with us already, and the collector had visibly—and indeed audibly—tired of some of the reports which the sub-deputy had handed in. This was the reason why, on this occasion, he had bethought him of lending him the elephant which a planter had lent us in case we had time for some sport. The idea was that the sub-deputy, travelling slowly and



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joltily on the elephant, could not reach our next camp till nightfall, and would not in any case be able to write notes on the way.

Grunts from the collector and the words "I never read such stuff" broke into my thoughts and reminded me of the lines:

"Oh, what a tangled web we weave,  
When first we practise to deceive."

The collector had thought to deceive the sub-deputy, and this tangled web of foolscap was the result.

"What's it all about?" I asked, as the word "idiot," followed by the word "fathead," disturbed the even tenor of his perusal.

"I'll read it if you like," said the collector.

"Do," I answered, and he began as follows:

"Your Honour,—I beg to report with all brevity the nature of catastrophe which has befallen self and party, including elephant which your Honour out of golden heart and consideration of fatigues endured in official capacity by these presents kindly loaned the same for purposes of transit."

"It's not a serious catastrophe, I hope," I said as the collector paused for breath at the end of this imposing opening sentence.

"Wait," said the collector, and went on:

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"Party in question consisted, as your Honour would doubtless remember, of (1) Self, (2) Ramsan (chuprassie), (3) Mahout (elderly man—name unknown) mounted on aforesaid elephant (sex of elephant, female), together with goods and chattels belonging to your Honour, including official papers."

"The only goods and chattels I remember"—the collector broke off to make the comment—"are an empty tea-basket and a pair of old puttees the bearer tied on to it. I haven't the faintest recollection of any official papers."

"Never mind," I said, "he has the gift of language. How about the catastrophe?"

The collector returned to his foolscap:

"Contingent started from village of Rumdaha, after transaction of business according to instructions, at 10:31 A.M., and route was taken past village well—gift of Kari Babu in token of gratitude of providential saving of life of Viceroy from bomb of assassin."

"Kari Babu, by the way," interpolated the collector, "is the man who is supposed to be at the back of the dacoities in this district. He sunk the well as soon as he found out that he was being suspected. Red herring, of course. However, you may be feeling anxious about the sub-deputy, so I'd better get on":

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"At distance of forty paces from well right turn was made into small jungle (flora consisting mainly of wild plum, dog-rose, cotton tree, etc.) where story of villager concerning *chota bagh*, which has carried off three goat, one calf, within recent months, caused sub-deputy collector to give warning to mahout to proceed with caution. I have pleasure to report that Jungle was traversed without hitch or confusion, elephant debouching herein and thereafter upon open country gradually conducting to nature of low swamp."

"This is very exciting," I said, as the collector again paused, "but do you mind telling me if we are getting anywhere near the catastrophe?"

"Not by a long way," he said. "There are three pages of pure scenic description before we get anywhere near. However, if you're tired already, I'll leave them out and get to the critical parts."

"I'm not tired," I explained; "I'm only consumed with anxiety. Don't leave out anything vital to the plot—but don't forget that I am thrilled all over."

"All right," said the collector, turning over four or five pages. "I think this ought to do you. Some hours have elapsed—they are still in the low country. Here we are":

"12:9 P.M. Large Jheel intervening, question arises as to how we shall surmount same, as ground

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adjoining approximates to swamp. Different arguments are pursued *ad nauseam*. Ramsan opinions that way forward will show satisfactory finale in spite of watery mire; mahout stiffly maintains doubt if such method will eventuate too softly for elephant, and proposes back turn and forward by the left, thereby prolonging mileage. I hesitate to adjudicate between equal differents until jungly man who is cutting reeds by waterside is espied. I command him to approach and say if route through mire is safe. His response is in the affirmative, whereupon I abjure mahout to proceed incontinently. His face takes on the sullens, but he prods elephant in obedience to orders from superior quarters. Elephant also takes on the sullens, and with uneasily circulating trunk makes ginger steps, presently stopping. Mahout again protests this not a good way, but having word of jungly villager that all is well, I say to him 'Forward. Trust the people.' "

"Good old democrat, the sub-deputy," I could not help saying.

"He's probably no longer a democrat," said the collector, and went on:

"In another instant the worst has happened. Elephant putting right forefoot in swamp is unable to withdraw same and is ensued with panic, whereby plunges and violent kicks follow and cause miasmas and terrible smells to arise from decaying

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vegetation of mire. All the pad rocks, threatening momentary precipitation of all into swamp water of unfathomable depth. I hold your Honour's official papers in one hand, with the other I maintain insecure balance. Ramsan holds with both hands to rope. Mahout prods elephant in vain, using improper words."

"There is something extremely heroic in the way he is holding on to your papers," I said. "Ramsan and the mahout do not compare favourably with him. Please notice that. The sub-deputy does not wish to make a point of their cowardice, but he trusts to you to read between the lines."

The collector grinned and read on:

"12:12 P.M. Elephant is stuck permanently in swamp and is immoveable. Loss of all concerned is threatened. N.B.—I have the honour to report conduct of jungly villager—who has hastily disappeared—as worthy of punishment owing to ignorant misdirecting of official party by word of mouth. 12:13 P.M. Observations show that elephant has now sunk two inches beyond original sinkage. Ramsan exhibits craven mind and wishes to dismount and pull for the shore. I abjure all to stick to the ship (i.e. pad of elephant), pointing out at same time that swamp is infested with crocodiles (visible, two fish-eating ditto; invisible, man-eating ditto; query, how many?). I hold always your Honour's official papers in unemployed hand.

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12:15 P.M. I have to report mutinous conduct of Ramsan, who, lowering himself by tail of elephant, has swum ashore and is now drying clothes in sun, having precariously run blockade of imperceptible crocodiles. 12:20 P.M. Mahout threatens to depart for the land. I strongly deprecate and forbid desertion of superior officer, the elephant and your Honour's official papers. Mahout arguing that elephant might be rescued if help was obtainable, and that in all cases he will no longer remain to sink with ship, I give involuntary permission to depart. 12:21 P.M. Mahout has reached shore and is now drying garment in company with chuprassie. Sudden appearance of man-eating crocodile (length—estimated from snout visible at some distance—equals fourteen feet) adds greatly to dangers of swim ashore, especially to those who like undersigned are unaccomplished to swim. I therefore sit tight guarding your Honour's official papers. Heat of sun extreme. Many teal floating on waters of jheel."

"There's observation for you in the hour of peril," said the collector.

"But look here," I said mystified. "How has he managed to put all this down on paper minute by minute as it happened? I suppose it would be possible, but I shouldn't somehow have suspected the sub-deputy of the requisite sang-froid."

"Nor would anybody," asserted the collector.

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"Of course he's written it all up afterwards. The time-table's only a fine journalistic touch done by guesswork. We are just getting to where he lets that cat out of the bag. Listen":

"12:30 P.M. I beg to report elephant has sunk a further three inches, but is quiescent. I have therefore taken opportunity to abstract paper from bag and begin report to your Honour as above, hoping to forward by trusted messenger if same appears. At present no hope. Position of affairs. (1.) Mahout and chuprassie drying garments in sun. (2.) Self alone upon pad of elephant writing report. Latter bearing notable resemblance to that of character in well-known poem. I refer to moving lines of gifted poetess:

"'The boy stood on the burning deck  
Whence all but he had fled'—"

owing to mistaken instructions of absent Father. Your Honour standing in same loco but having left no orders except to proceed by elephant to village of Rajganj—now an impossibility—duty is clear to remain on elephant, thereby avoiding destruction by man-eater of self and your Honour's official papers. 12:33 P.M. Villager makes distant appearance. I order mahout and chuprassie to bring same within conversational limit. They pursue instanter. 12:35 P.M. Villager makes reluctant approach by scruff of neck and receives injunctions to swim to elephant and bear despatches to your

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Honour relating to catastrophe. 12:36 P.M. Disinclination of villager who fears man-eater. 12:39 P.M. After lecture by undersigned on duty to Emperor George, your Honour and God Almighty, and short statement of nature of punishment on failure of compliance with orders, villager swims to elephant. 12:40 P.M. I hurriedly conclude despatches by reporting that your Honour's official papers are still safe but unpleasant disaster threatened if rescue not afforded within reasonable hours. 12:41 P.M. Last words. God save your Honour, also Emperor George.

‘ Your obedient servant,  
B. P. GHOSH, Sub-deputy Collector.’ ”

“ Is that all? ” I enquired as the collector subsided against the tree-trunk, slightly exhausted from the strain of reading.

“ Positively the last words,” said the collector. “ I suppose we shall have to go and see about pulling him out now. Confound him! ”

“ If he is still alive,” I said reproachfully.

“ Alive! ”

“ Do you mean that he isn't in any danger? ”

The collector doubted it.

“ It'll be a considerable work getting the elephant out,” he said heartlessly, “ and I suppose there is just a chance that it might sink at the end of some hours, if it's really properly bogged. In that case Ramson would see that the sub-deputy was got



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ashore. The mahout's calmness points to the fact that there is no immediate risk. Besides, this boy"—he indicated the runner who had brought the report and who was squatting comfortably on his haunches a little way off—"thinks that the elephant is not very deep, and says that Ramsan and the mahout thought it could be pulled out if they could get some other elephants to do the pulling. Apparently Ramsan was going off to try to borrow a couple from a Babu who lives in some village not far off. He may be on the scene by now. Still, I imagine something will go wrong if we don't turn up personally. Hang the sub-deputy for not leaving the mahout to go his own way."

"His intentions were good," I pleaded.

"They always are," said the collector bitterly. "But see what they amount to"—he tapped the sheet of foolscap—"the boy says that when he left him he was writing another report."

"The sooner we rescue him, then, the better," I said.

The collector shouted for the syce to bring the ponies, and having given instructions to the bearer to go forward with our baggage to the village at which we were due that night, mounted and bade the boy lead us to the jheel which, he had gathered, could not be much more than five miles away.

"An extra ten miles for the ponies," grumbled the collector. "But I suppose it might be worse."

The boy ran before us lightly, and we trotted

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after him at a pace which, assuming the sub-deputy to be *in articulo mortis*, was not dashing. However, as the collector pointed out, it was no good laying the ponies up. This practical reflection prevented me from lamenting our Lycidas prematurely, and indeed I remember that I was in good spirits and smoked a second cheroot as I rode. Yet heartlessness is not my leading characteristic.

The jheel, it turned out, lay considerably off the route we had taken in the morning, so much so that the collector was of the opinion that either the chuprassie or the mahout had had business of his own in that direction—business only dubiously connected with the Government service.

“Possibly they were gonig to take an hour or two off to do some tax-collecting on their own account, while the sub-deputy busily wrote a book on the manners and customs of the district,” he suggested. “This looks like getting to the jheel.”

Five minutes later, following a firm path between tall grasses and squishy bog, we sighted an extensive jheel covered in the distance with hosts of water-birds; but it was not until we reached the far end of it and turned a bend hidden by the giant reeds that we came upon the scene of the disaster.

In the middle of a small swamp, that was a sort of backwater of the main jheel, the elephant stood sunk to its shoulders. It was evidently in a resigned or hopeless state, for its small eyes were partially closed, its trunk curled limply, its tail

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was submerged, and its whole body motionless. Not thus limp was the sub-deputy collector, who sat in the centre of the pad. He had evidently decided that there was no further danger of sudden plunges from the elephant, for he had resigned his hold on the rope and arranged himself in a picturesque posture fronting the shore, on which half a dozen grown-up villagers and as many children had assembled and were squatting and watching him apathetically. The exact posture is difficult to describe. It was a sitting posture, at once stiff but majestic. In his left hand he held a bunch of papers, which I rightly concluded were the official papers already referred to; in his right a large pencil. On his knees, which were hunched up before him, was about a quire of foolscap at which he wrote at intervals. I say "at which" rather than "on which," because, in order not to take any risks from overbalancing, he only wrote with one hand and would not bend so as to get comfortably near his paper. I think, too, that he was trying to impress the crowd, for whenever some profound thought struck him, he jabbed so airily at the foolscap and wore such an important frown that he almost seemed to be saying, "This is the way we have in Government service. No difficulties deter us. We write to the last gasp."

He had not seen us coming round the corner, so that we were able to watch the birth and inscription of several ideas. I particularly liked the

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bend of his shoulders and the solar topee thrust well forward on his head.

"Napoleon on the *Bellerophon*," I murmured to the collector, who, unmoved by the comparison, called sharply:

"What's all this nonsense, Babu? Why don't you come ashore?"

As I say, the sub-deputy had not seen us, and the sudden and not altogether amiable hail made him jump so that his attitude became quite unstudied and his topee nearly fell off into the water. He managed, however, to catch it with the hand that held the pencil, and, bowing courteously from the neck, said in his genial and most effusive manner:

"Your Honour! This is great kindness indeed—very great kindness. But such is invariable and expected habitude of your Honour to all subordinate members of staff. Only belief in your Honour's magnanimity and certainty to return to rescue——"

"Yes, yes," said the collector, with more than a trace of impatience in his voice; "but I want to know why you haven't come ashore?"

"Your Honour," returned the sub-deputy swiftly and, if possible, still more genially, "I have to report lamentable catastrophe—due firstly to treacherous and ignorant direction of villager, secondly to obstinate behaviour of Ramsan, who——"

"I know all that," said the collector; "but why don't you come ashore?"

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"Because, your Honour," replied the sub-deputy as if pained, "I have to report that this elephant is sunk."

"You're not sunk," said the collector.

"No, no," said the sub-deputy, allowing a graceful smile to play about his features in case this might be a witticism, "but I have to report to your Honour that dangers of sinking are considerable, depth of swamp varying from—" his unoccupied hand shot out eagerly for his manuscript—"firstly, probable depth beyond elephant——"

"The depth on this side of the elephant is the only thing that matters," interrupted the collector.

"That is very true, your Honour," said the sub-deputy with a deferential smile. "Probable depth this side of elephant is——"

"Is three feet at the outside," said the collector.

"Not including depth of submerged mud, your Honour," insisted the sub-deputy eagerly. "Probable depth of mud——"

"Blow the mud," said the collector. "The mahout and chuprassie came ashore all right."

"But they have ability to swim," urged the sub-deputy. "Also, being ignorant men they ignored danger from man-eaters."

"Fudge!" said the collector. "There's no danger from man-eaters whatever."

The sub-deputy had an enormous chest, which he inflated to its fullest capacity before he answered.

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"I do not fear man-eaters for myself, your Honour. But as I have stated to mahout and chuprassie respectively, I am responsible bearer of your Honour's official papers. If seized by man-eater——"

The sub-deputy collector left his sentence unfinished, a slight quaver in his voice indicating the extent of the calamity which was in that case to be looked for. I think it touched the collector's heart. I think we both realised that while a certain sensitiveness as regarded his own person might have helped to determine the sub-deputy not to plunge in among the crocodiles of his imagination, the real deciding factor was the fear of risking the precious official papers.

"I can't think what he's got hold of," the collector murmured to me. "I'm positive there were no papers of the slightest value on the elephant."

"He's got a bundle of some sort," I pointed out.

"Still, he must come ashore," insisted the collector. "What is it?" he added to an old villager, who had come up and begun jabbering and gesticulating. "Two elephants arriving, are they? That settles it then. They'll want to begin hauling at once." He turned once more to the sub-deputy and shouted, "You must come ashore now. Ramsan is bringing up other elephants to haul this one out. There may be a lot of plunging, and then where would you be?"

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"But, your Honour——" began the sub-deputy in great agitation.

The collector cut him short.

"I quite appreciate," he said, "the spirit you have shown in looking after my papers, but you must bear in mind that the safety of a Government official—especially one who has shown such care and consideration as yourself, Babu"—the sub-deputy acknowledged this compliment with an anxious, but gratified, smile and a nervous lifting of his solar topee—"is much more important than any papers. I now order you to come ashore. If anything happens to the papers on the way I shall bear the responsibility."

"Yes, your Honour, I come," said the sub-deputy collector, with a groan.

"One of the natives will go into the water and will beat it with a stick," added the collector. "As you know, this will drive away any crocodile there could possibly be. Never mind about the papers; you can leave them behind."

"I shall bring them, your Honour," said the sub-deputy; and with the grim face of one leading a forlorn hope, gathered up all his documents in one hand, and with the other let himself down by the elephant's tail into the mud.

Only a large-sized camera could have done justice to that shoreward struggle. It was slow, because the mud was undoubtedly soft and the sub-deputy undoubtedly heavy. Actually the water

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came up to his waist, but the demeanour of the sub-deputy somehow suggested bottomless depths, not to mention innumerable crocodiles. I doubt if there was any big enough in the jheel to pull him down; but if there had been, it would not have had the added satisfaction of pulling down the official papers, for the sub-deputy held these high above his head, and would, I am convinced, so have held them, till he was dragged under. His progress became a little less impressive as the swamp became shallower, but it remained fine enough for me up to the very last moment, when, having attained dry land, he puffed out his chest once more, strode manfully up to the collector, and said:

"I beg to present your Honour's official papers. Also, later notes made on back of sunk elephant."

"That's all right," said the collector. "Now you'd better try and dry yourself while they're getting out the elephant. Next time you're on an elephant in a swamp, Babu, you'd do well to trust the elephant and not the people."

"Certainly, your Honour," said the sub-deputy agreeably, "I shall do so."

It was not until the elephant had been got out with considerable difficulty, and we had mounted again and begun to retrace our steps in the direction of the village we had started for that morning, that the collector bethought him of the bundle of documents which the sub-deputy had presented to



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him. He had stuffed them into his coat-pocket, and now he pulled them out with the remark:

"I think I'll get rid of some of this. I don't think we shall need the sub-deputy's further notes, for example."

He detached the foolscap sheets, which the sub-deputy had so convulsively written from the burning deck, and dropped them into a wayside patch of grass.

"Don't make a mistake and throw away the official papers," I warned him.

"Oh, they're specially tied up with string," he said. "I wonder what they are."

He dropped the reins on the pony's neck and untied the string, and unfolded before my curious gaze the following articles: 1. An old toothbrush of his own. He had meant to leave it behind, but the bearer must have found it and wrapped it in an old sheet of the *Pioneer*. 2. One of those highly scented and padded Christmas cards which important Zemindars are in the habit of sending in to the district magistrate with the compliments of the season (this the collector, who dislikes scent, had also endeavoured to abandon in the wilderness). 3. The cover wrappings of two sevenpenny novels which, by the brightness of their colouring had evidently appealed to the bearer and been deemed by him worthy of preservation.

The collector is not sentimental, and as he heaved this curious assortment also into the jungle he

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muttered words derogatory to his official subordinates in general and to the sub-deputy in particular.

"All the same," he said in an apologetic sort of way as we trotted forward through the cool of the evening, "I believe he would have taken a bite from a crocodile rather than lose what he thought to be official papers."

"I'm sure he would," I agreed. "And that's the main thing. It's the hero himself and not his achievements that gives us hope for the future."

## THE FINLESS DEATH

**D**ON MIGUEL, proprietor of the inn grown about with orange-trees, yellow and green, that grew juicily in the warm airs of the gulf, was flustered.

It could not be the heat that flustered him, for it was still before dawn; and, though at any moment the sun might come blazing out, he was not thinking of it.

"Señores!" he said, appealingly.

The two Englishmen stopped.

"What does the fat fool want?" asked Flackman, impatiently.

"Don't know," said Kender. "I'll ask him"—and he put the question fluently in Spanish.

"If I might be permitted," said the inn-keeper, extending the palms of his hands in emphasis, "I would advise the Señores."

"The advice of Don Miguel is more precious than pearls," said Kender, courteously, resting the butt-end of his heavy rod on the ground, "and, without doubt, the oyster does not contain more. But in what does the advice consist?"

Don Miguel bowed to the compliment, and made answer:

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"It is that the Señores should not go fishing to-day."

"For what reason?"

Don Miguel had many reasons, apparently.

"The day is warm, yet on land, in the 'arbour, very cool. How pleasant to sit there and sip aguardiente. Also, Rietta will sing to the Señores. She had this morning the voice of a nightingale."

"She has the voice of six nightingales invariably," said Kender. "Also, aguardiente is good. But we came to fish."

"Consider, Señor, how easily the sun goes to the head of the unaccustomed."

"True," said Kender. "But the hands of both of us are thick as the rinds of pumpkins, and are protected by sombreros."

"The heads of the Señores are of an excellent proportion," said Don Miguel, hastily. "And yet—there might be a hurricane."

"I see no sign of it," Kender maintained.

The inn-keeper became yet more earnest.

"Señor," he said, "you will laugh, I know it, or maybe frown, for it is Don Flackman that laughs always, thinking these things but superstitions, and of no account."

"But what things?"

Don Miguel looked about him anxiously as if he feared the presence of some supernatural agency, and crossed himself, before he answered in a low voice.

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"Things that are said—in fear—the Mexicans say them. Without doubt these half-breeds are mad compared to your excellencies, and yet I, who live here and know, who am of the blood of Castile, I also am afraid. Señor, I ask you, where are the German Señores that went fishing yesterday? Them also I warned and"—again he crossed—"they have not returned."

"Warned them of what?" said Kender, eager to get to the point.

The inn-keeper dropped his voice still lower.

"Of the Finless Death," he said.

Kender looked at him curiously. The man was evidently earnest in his warnings, for the sweat stood out on his face, and he wrung his fat hands as if in dread of some impending evil. Kender himself, a scientist, a little man, but firm-lipped, unemotional, and with a chin that betokened incredulity, was the last person to take a superstition literally, or to be moved by it. Nevertheless, he hesitated a moment. It seemed to him as if something—some danger perhaps—might underlie this manifest fear.

"Aren't you coming?" said Flackman, impatiently.

He had not understood the conversation, and was longing to reach the fishing-grounds.

"In a minute," said Kender, and he turned to the inn-keeper. "What is the Finless Death?" he said tapping him on the arm.

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Don Miguel turned up the whites of his eyes.

"Señor, how should I know? Only this I have heard—that at the full moon the Finless Death moves on the lagoons, and makes men stark with fear. Last night it was almost full."

"True," said Kender, "it was undeniably almost full."

"And twice Pedro, that, as the Señor knows, is an unerring watch-dog, bayed violently."

"At what?"

"At nothing."

"And therefore at this devil?" said Kender, smiling.

The inn-keeper evaded insisting on this sequence.

"The German Señores have not returned," he repeated significantly.

"Nor paid their bill?" asked Kender.

"That is no hinge," said Don Miguel, with dignity. "I have warned the Señores." He turned away hurt.

"And truly I am most grateful," said Kender; "but my friend, as you perceive, is not to be persuaded, and therefore we go to fish. Maybe we shall catch the finless thing itself."

The inn-keeper threw up his hands in an ecstasy of horror as Kender followed Flackman through the orange-groves, that led down to the creek where José, the half-breed, was getting ready the boat. Flackman was highly amused to hear of the inn-keeper's alarm.

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"You refused to be warned?"

"Don't you?"

"My dear man," said Kender, "I never take warnings—at least in so far as they frighten a man away from what he does know by what he does not know. It's my business to learn, just as it's my business to jest. I only told you because—well—you know you've got an imagination—it might get on your nerves."

"Nonsense!" said Flackman, and added inconsequently: "Miguel is a fat man, and all fat men are fools."

"I incline to think there's something in it."

"Some Mexican, full of aguardiente, saw a cuttle-fish at the full moon once."

"Perhaps—but it's descriptive—their name for the terror?"

"O, that I grant you," said Flackman, laughing. "They make a good case for their demons by giving them a sounding title, but they've got too many of 'em—only they seem to have impressed you, Kender?"

"Not much," said Kender, "I'm interested, I admit; I take it to be some water-devil—something connected with fish."

"But finless."

"An eel, perhaps—it's quite easy to imagine an eel without fins—or some sort of water-snake."

"Sea-serpent," Flackman suggested. He was much amused to see Kender—usually so sceptical—

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interesting himself in Don Miguel's supernatural absurdity. For his own part, he could think of nothing but the desire to hear his reel run again, and to hold up a fighting fish by his own skilful handling till it should be drawn to the boat-side, and the gaff, splashing faintly a hundredweight of tired silver. And it was a day of days for fishing—the sky already full of suppressed brightness, as if the sun were just behind it, and the morning unwontedly fresh. Ahead of them, Flackman could see the creek (solitary, since it was before the time when tarpon-fishing had become a fashionable amusement), and the boat and the Mexican boatman lolling beside it. He was almost annoyed with Kender that with such a view before him he would go on discussing his ridiculous subject, quite gravely too.

“But it might be some kind of sea-serpent,” he was saying, “or merely a delusion, as you seem to think; for it doesn't take anything tangible to give these fellows a belief in some new devil. But I should like to know. After all, it is strange that the civilized people should be so incurious about fish, which are the ugliest things in earth or sea. Think how they were detested in bygone times! The ancients considered them not only uneatable, but unclean abominations—a part of the devilish things that lived in the sea that was always—the devil!”

“Poor old bats!” said Flackman. “They never  
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knew what it was to fly fish. And here's José, alive and as energetic as usual. I almost expected to find he'd been swallowed by a whale!"

José's energy was not conspicuous. He began by suggesting that it was not a good day for bites. Asked why, he said because the night before the moon was full. Flackman began to lose his temper.

"It's some trick," he said, "that the scamp has got up with Miguel. He wants to slack."

"It is a possibility," Kender admitted, thoughtfully, "but, at the same time. . . ."

"I don't believe you want to go either."

"Never wanted to fish more," Kender said.

"It doesn't look like it."

"And if we could catch this finless beast, I should be happy for days."

"O! confound it!" said Flackman.

His spirits were mercurial, and this reiteration of an unpleasant topic was getting on his nerves. Doubtless, the whole thing was absurd; but it was unpleasant. Flackman himself thought nothing of it. He kept on assuring himself of that; but, at the same time, he was one of those who, not altogether self-reliant, liked to have their opinion corroborated by their company. And here was Kender frowning over this suggestion of peril as if he were assured there were some bottom in it, if one only knew. He wanted to fish, not to face a mystery. If he had known what they were going to encounter, he might have hung back. But he

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did not know, and Kender was remorseless in the pursuit of science.

"Hurry up, José," said Flackman, pettishly.

It was very sullenly that the Mexican pulled seaward, and Flackman was reduced to whistling to keep his own spirits up. The sea ran from creek to creek, lagoon-like reaches, and spaces of the bluest calm, locked in from the gulf by reefs only to be passed at certain tides and points where the rollers had forced an inlet, as sheep force their way through a hedge, by incessant pressing. They had made a good many futile casts in the open, and Flackman's spirits were at zero, before, at Kender's suggestion, they made for one of these lagoons for a last throw. Kender had relieved the Mexican at the oars, and had his back turned to the bows, so that as they shot into that reach of still water, slack and shining, except where it was criss-crossed by dull patches that looked like stains on polished walnut, it was the younger man who saw and sprang to his feet pointing to something ahead: "What's that?" he cried.

Out in the middle water, immobile, a boat floated, as though anchored in a pond. A single oar, broken at the blade, was caught in the left rollock and suspended.

As Kender stood up, he observed that there were two men in the stern, who seemed to be standing in stiff attitudes.

"H'm," he said, and he sat himself down again

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to row for the boat, unconcerned enough, but with a little extra speed. Flackman remained standing: his eyes moved uneasily.

"Ship your oars," he said excitedly, as they came bow to bow with the other boat.

Kender shipped his oars, and sat steadying the boat in the expectation that Flackman would step across to it, if it were only for curiosity. But Flackman had no curiosity and he had gone very pale.

"Hadn't you better—hadn't we better be getting back?" he said.

Kender carefully refrained from expressing anything, but he picked up his rod which lay in the way, and stepped across past the shrinking Mexican into the other boat. Flackman was flushing now with shame at his own poltroonery.

"What's the matter with them?" he sung out, for the swing of Kender stepping across had sent the two boats apart.

The little man had rammed his rod methodically under the bow-seat, the line overboard to prevent a tangle, and was contemplating the two figures. He saw at once they were the Germans of whom Don Miguel had spoken.

"What's the matter?" cried Flackman again.

He was in an agony of uneasiness, and in the merest pretence began making casts. Again he appealed to Kender:

"You might say what's the matter with them."

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"Death!" said Kender, curtly.

Why do they look like that?"

"I don't know."

Kender sat on the thwarts and considered them. Never had he seen such dead men—in attitude exaggeratedly alive, rigid as waxworks, and hideous in their mimic intensity! One, a great bearded man, with spectacles, had his hand on the dragging oar and half knelt to it, as if he had been caught by a blinding cramp in the act of pulling; the other, of a slighter build, was bent forward standing, a gaff in his hand, menacing, as it seemed, the empty space in the middle of the boat—at least it should have been empty, but there was a slime over it, as if a great snail had crawled there. The faces of the two were indescribably afraid.

"Now, how did that slime get there?" said Kender to himself.

Almost as if in answer, Flackman gave a shout.

"I've hooked something!" he said. "By gad! and a heavy one!" he went on, as the thick rod bent nearly double under the weight.

"You'd better cut your line," said Kender, gruffly. "It's hardly time to fish."

"Right," said Flackman. But he didn't.

Mechanically he had struck, and equally mechanically he began to reel up. He had a semi-conscious idea of saving as much of his line as possible before he cut loose, and as he saw far down the loom of a great white fish, the zeal of sport carried him

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away. He reeled steadily, the rod seemed strained with a dead weight, but there was no rush or plunging. Quite suddenly the white mass was on the surface, and as Flackman tightened his hold and yelled for the gaff, it seemed to fly up into the boat. It fell, facing the bows, where the Mexican was sitting, the hook in its mouth, the line broken.

Flackman stared. From its size the fish could not have weighed less than a hundred pounds, yet it had come up without a struggle, and had been landed ungaffed. Now it lay there heaving equably—a white-bellied, shapeless thing, rotund and flabby, with the detestable lidless fish eyes.

"It's a remarkable fish," said Flackman, curiously.

"Very," said Kender.

"Did you see how it came up?"

"Yes. What are you going to do with it?"

"Chuck it over, if possible."

"I should."

They seemed unanimous in thinking it would be a good riddance.

"Hi, José! give me a hand. Hullo! what's wrong?" Flackman saw that some strange malady had seized the Mexican. He seemed to be stiffening as he crouched in the bows; his arms were stretched out fixedly, like the arms of a sign-post. Kender started.

"What's he pointing at?" he shouted.

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"The fish. Ugh! it's oozing slime!"

"Slime!"

"A sort of snail slime."

Flackman drew back from the fish, disgusted.

"It's too filthy to touch," he went on. "It's—by gad—Kender—it's got no fins!" His voice rose nervously. "What is it? What's it doing, and to José."

He began to stammer, frightened at he knew not what. The Mexican was growing most rigid.

"José!" shouted Kender, imperiously.

There was no answer but Flackman's.

"He's—he's being poisoned, I think."

"Go and shake him!"

"I daren't."

The two Englishmen eyed each other from the boats. Then Flackman, seized with a spasm of shame or horror, snatched up the gaff and stabbed the fish through the grey-skinned back. A white ichor spurted up and took him on the arm. Kender saw him drop the gaff, clutch at his elbow, and begin to mumble wildly. It was then that a fear began to take hold of him also; he could do nothing where he sat, for there were no oars to the boat.

"Flackman!" he said, sharply.

"No fins, no fins!" muttered the other.

"Come here!" commanded Kender.

Flackman looked up in a dazed manner, and took a step towards the oars. There, as his eye caught

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the white-bellied fish lying there, he shrank back, crying out:

"No fins, no fins!"

Even while he cried another spirt of the fluid came from the cut in the creature's back, and dribbled over his arm. He cried out, and unsheathed his knife. Before Kender could say anything, he had stuck it into his arm and stabbed again and again. Kender watched the blood stream helplessly, for he could do nothing unless Flackman would bring the boats together. He longed for an oar, longed to be able to swim. Again he shouted sharply:

"Bring her up!"

"No, no, Kender," the young man spoke in a strange voice. "I mustn't do that—I mustn't do that."

"Why not?"

"Because. . . " Flackman paused, and looked out of the corner of his eyes slyly. "You understand, Kender, don't you?"

"I tell you to come here," said Kender, firmly.

"It's—no—it's impossible."

It seemed to be, for Flackman was like a child in his obstinacy. Kender changed his tactics accordingly.

"The fish will have you then," he called.

The effect was magical. Flackman sprang up, looked at the fish, shuddered, and, diving into the sea began to swim to the other boat. Kender

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watched. Surely it was the most peaceful scene in the world, a man swimming silently in a sea still to the horizon, scattering bubbles like diamonds before him, and leaving behind him the clear curve of his wake—a blue sky, unbeaten by any storm, a swimmer, and two pleasure-boats. And yet Kender was beginning to feel afraid. He tried to argue the fear away, but it would not go. It crept over him jointless, inexplicable, binding as a nightmare. He laughed at himself in sheer bravado, and the laugh stuck in his throat and became a shrill giggling that seemed to carry his reason with it high up above his reach. He clutched after it, to recall it, and could not. For he knew that the man that was swimming towards him had a face distorted with terror; that the boat in which he sat and giggled held two men grotesquely dead: that the blue, calm sea was vacant of human help. And in the other boat lay that monstrous fish without fins, staring the life out of the Mexican. It was with a struggle that he drew himself together, shivering, and pulled his friend on board.

Flackman fell in the bottom of the boat exhausted. He muttered continually, and was plainly delirious, for through his multifarious imaginings there ran always the vague thread of terror that haunts delirious men.

"No fins, no fins," he would moan, and clutch at the arm Kender had bound up.

It was impossible to relieve him. Kender wished



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for his own sake that anything could be done, for in this feeling of impotence was evil, and he was aware that his own hysteria was growing. Must they wait, then, for ever on that hateful sea? He tried the broken oar, but it would not move the heavy boat an inch. They must lie there, it seemed, and grow to knowledge of what fear could be. He sat and stared before him, and then, without warning, the last horror came. The bows of the other boat lifted suddenly, so that the Mexican rolled over and was seen to sink, while almost imperceptibly the boat itself began to glide towards them, the fish on board. As it came near, throwing no ripples before it, Kender bit his lips in agony.

There was no help—none! The boat was gliding with so swift a motion that it seemed upon them, and yet he could see still far down in the water the corpse of the Mexican, all huddled up and stiff—still twirling head over heels, round and round, deeper and deeper, to the bottom ooze. Not ten yards separated them now from the horror that blinked there in the other boat and heaved its hideous whiteness—not eight—and it was death—the death without fins—not five!

Kender shrieked aloud and ran about the boat, so that it rocked violently. For a moment it seemed an added terror, and then he saw the reason. The rod—his rod—clinchd in the bows as he stepped on board, had hooked something with its dangling bait—something that went with jerks and rushes, darting ahead, towing the boat after it—some huge

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tarpon. It made for the opening by which they had passed into the lagoon and for the open sea. Behind, always quickening, the other boat came, drawn on by its own mysterious power. With tense eyes, Kender watched this strange race, in which he and his friend stood for both prize and spoil. Without reasoning the matter, he somehow knew (so he said afterwards) that that which reached the open sea would win away. The line taken zig-zagged for the outlet. Kender dared not stir, but he prayed to reach it, and the boat seemed to go quick with his longing.

The water flew under them—surely the outlet could not be far off—the other boat was gaining—no—yes—ah, but the outlet was before them. Their boat was through it. With a rasping noise, the ghastly boat behind drove on a sunk reef to the left. Kender, as his senses went from him in a swoon, fancied that he saw leap from it, like a great curl of smoke, the great white fish that turned in mid-air and plunged noiselessly into the sea. . . .

It was towards dusk, and some seven miles off shore, that the yacht *Swallow* came on a drifting boat, noticeable for a rod bent in its bows like a bowsprit and snapped off as if by the jerk of some fish that had been hooked and had escaped. Besides this, there were on board two dead men, half standing in constrained positions, and two alive, a young man obviously raving, and another man—older—who might have been sane, except that his lips twitched continuously, and he told this story.

## THE ADVENTURE OF THE PERSIAN PRINCE

**I**T was at the end of the Easter term that old Topsy, our Head (his real name being the Rev. Adolphus Turvey, M.A.), announced in Hall that after the holidays we should have among us the representative of an ancient and memorable kingdom, whose glories were before Athens, or something of that sort, and that he hoped young Yusuf would find to the full at Ripley House that spirit of frankness and comradeship which was the distinguishing feature of English schoolboys, and carry away many happy memories. We cheered a little at the time, though we hadn't a notion who Yusuf was or what sort of a kingdom he hung out in.

When the holidays came to an end, I and Wharncliffe, with whom I had been staying, returned to Ripley together, and had a cab up from the station. We had two grass snakes and three hedgehogs, which I got through while the Matron was sniffing some flowers that Mrs. Wharncliffe sent her.

"How kind of your mother," she said. "They do smell nice."

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"Ripping!" said Wharncliffe, winking to me to cut, as the grass-snakes smelt a good deal stronger than the roses. "Anyone new?"

"There are six new boys—besides the Persian Prince."

"By Jove, the representative! I'd forgotten about him," said Wharncliffe.

We went off then to be kind, as the Matron asked us; and, after we had stacked our beasts, we found him, feeling pretty dull from his appearance. His name was Akbar Yusuf-ud-Keen, and he was a sort of grand-nephew many times removed of the Shah, so that his rank was pretty high in his own country.

We couldn't find out from him what exactly his country was, but Barham, who takes the fifth form, thought it was Arabia Felix, so called from the scarcity of dates. He was darkish, with a small moustache, though a good deal bigger than Barham's, but he had the thinnest shins I ever saw.

Wharncliffe and I rather took to the P.P., as he interested us and was beastly grateful, though fierce when provoked. We taught him a good deal in the short time he stayed, all things considered.

He turned up at Soccer the first time in a pair of scarlet patent leather bath slippers, which he thought would do to play in; but Barham, who was refing, wouldn't have it, and sent him to change.

I fancy Barham took rather a spite against the P.P., being jealous of his moustache; and the P.P.

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hated Barham, and once called him a "dom cheat" when he gave off-side against the school-house. And Barham couldn't set him lines or anything, because he didn't understand any language much except his own.

The P.P. picked up footer pretty fast, though he hated having his shins kicked. These natives don't seem to have much endurance—even the princes—and many of their ideas are strange. And it is because of this that the adventure I have to relate occurred, and I am telling a good many things about Yusuf beforehand, as allowance must be made.

He had been sent over, he said, to learn the English diplomatic, which I suppose he thought had something to do with pot-hooks and spelling; and he was as uppish as an old cock when he got a sum right, which was seldom.

It was after he had been at the school some time that the adventure to which I have referred took place. You never know what small things lead to. Wharncliffe wanted some fresh air after stuffing Virgil, naturally enough; and, as it was a half-holiday, I proposed birds-nesting.

"We'd better have a third, then," said Wharncliffe. "Who shall we take?"

"Why not the P.P.?" said I. "He's never been out of bounds yet, so it would be new fun for him."

Wharncliffe agreed, and the P.P. was awfully

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pleased when we broached the subject to him.

"Me? To obtain the bird's nest?"

"Yes; we've got our eye on several," I said.

"Ever tried for a rook's nest?"

"Roc?" asked Yusuf, perplexed.

"He's thinking of Sinbad the Sailor," explained Wharncliffe. "Come along, old chap, we'll show you what it's like out of bounds."

Wharncliffe had had some cash sent by his mother the day before, so we had laid in some ginger-beer and puffs and started off pretty early. It was a hot sort of day, with a good many bees buzzing about, and dusty on the roads, so that we finished the ginger-beer before we started, which saved a good deal of trouble in carrying the bottles.

"It's all the better," Wharncliffe said, "if we're going on into Squire Hardy's place—might have to run."

"Is it an enemy—so?" asked Yusuf, showing his teeth. He was jolly excited, whether because he really thought we were going after roc's eggs (which must be hot work), or because the ginger-beer had gone to his head, we didn't know.

"Rather," I said. "If the keeper spots us, he's an enemy right enough. Mind you cut."

"Of course," said Yusuf. "I will cut."

And he tapped his chest with pride in his native manner.

Wharncliffe led the way over a gate into the fields. Yusuf came down on his pocket trying to

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vault after us and squashed the puffs. He was nearly weeping with excitement when we got into the woods. Wharncliffe told me afterwards that the P.P. seemed to have thought that out of bounds was some dangerous place where tigers abounded, and there were elephant-pits which you might fall into. I noticed at the time that his large cat's eyes kept blinking from one side to the other as he walked.

However, we were too keen on nests to wonder what the P.P. was thinking about, and I don't think anyone could really blame Wharncliffe and me. Of course we were out of bounds, but we were doing the P.P. a kindness, we thought. "Showing him the spirit of comradeship," as Wharncliffe said, and Topsy might have considered that afterwards, if he hadn't been in such a bilious fury.

We'd got five eggs by that time (one starling, one partridge, two hedge-sparrow, one blue, spotted with brown, name unknown to Wharncliffe or me.) Then I fancied I saw a woodpecker scuttle into a hole in an oak.

Wharncliffe gave me a leg up, and then I helped him, and we told the P.P., who was awfully bad at climbing to stick below and keep *cave*, in case a keeper came along. We got up the first part easily enough, but then the oak got twisty, and we went on the wrong tack. The old bird was fluttering round right enough; but it turned out that her hole was to the right when we'd got to the left.

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And Wharncliffe, who was below me, was just standing up to swing across when a nasty call came up.

"Naow, me lad, down yo' come, an' we'll see what the Squire'll say!"

Wharncliffe popped into the leafiest part like a weasel, and I sat still. It was impossible to know which of us the keeper had seen, and we both thought it was the other, and lay low. From where I was I could see pretty plainly, and was rather annoyed to find that the speaker was a thick-haired keeper we'd met before and cheeked pretty well. He wasn't the oldest of them either and could sprint, as we knew. He'd put his gun down at the foot of the tree and was pulling a switch, which looked nasty.

"Are yo' comen daown smart, or are yo' comen daown to smart?" he called up again with a chuckle. It is beastly having that sort of a man making low jokes at you when you can't see a way out.

"Keep your hair on, Towsy-head!" I sung out.

"Ho, there be two on you, be there?" he growled, looking in my direction, and I saw that I'd made a mistake, as he must have spotted young Wharncliffe before. But it was no good repenting now, and Wharny realised it and began checking too.

"Catch, Towsy," he called, and got him in the



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face with the jammy part of a puff. "You don't get jam every day, do you, Towsy?"

"Awright!" said the keeper angrily; "Ah'll mak' you smart when ah've gotten you."

Wharncliffe had come on to my bough again, as it was no good trying to hide; and he whispered:

"The P.P. ought to be kicked for this. *Cave* indeed!"

I'd quite forgotten for the moment that we'd left the P.P. standing below, where there was certainly no sign of him now.

"Where do you s'pose he is?" I asked.

"Bolted," said Wharncliffe. "He might have whistled."

It certainly did seem mean of the P.P. to have slipped off without a word like that, even if he was a barbarian and had no *esprit de corps*. You would have thought an Ojibbaway even would know better, and Persians are supposed to be a good deal more civilised than Red Indians, not going in for scalps and tomahawks.

Only, as it happened, we were mistaken about the P.P., worse luck. If only he had slunk off—which he hadn't done at all, except to conceal himself for a jiffy or two and brood gorily—we might have come to terms or made a dash for it. Not that Towsy showed any signs of going off to sleep, or of losing his prey as well as his hair. He sat tight at the bottom of the tree-trunk, and got rather strategic in the way he took cover from the more

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jammy pieces of the puff that we still had left; so that we had begun to reserve our ammunition and were naturally feeling a bit sick of the whole thing. Young Wharncliffe even went so far as to suggest a parley.

"I say," he called down, "why shouldn't we try and settle it?"

"Ah'm gwoan to try and settle it," said the gamekeeper.

The beast began chuckling harder than ever, having got out of his sulks by scoring over young Wharncliffe.

"It's no go," I said. "Shut up kowtowing. We'll make him wait, anyhow. Hullo!"

From our branch we could only see down on to a sort of small square patch of earth, as the leaves on both sides hid the rest of it. Towsy had squatted down on one end of it and begun smoking a pipe; we could only see his back. And just a yard or so from his back, creeping along towards it like a blooming tiger on the trail of a crocodile, came the P.P. He was sort of on all-fours, and on all his toes at once; and I never saw anything more like a nasty cat.

"Look!" I whispered to young Wharncliffe. "What's the P.P. up to?"

For half a moment we just stared, and then we both yelled:

"Look ahead, Towsy!" for the P.P. had a scimitar in his hand, and I howled to the P.P. to

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cut or he'd get a licking. Such was his hopeless and barbarous *esprit de corps*, however, that with a combined wriggle and dive he leaped on to the gamekeeper's shoulders.

Next instant Wharncliffe and I were tumbling down that oak tree in a heap. We arrived on our backs together as if we'd been doing a kind of three-legged race, and——

"Collar him low!" said Wharncliffe.

Luckily I got a clutch of his legs just as I fell, and we brought him down before he'd time to run amuck.

"Got a handkerchief?" asked Wharncliffe; and we tied him up with my handkerchief in grim silence.

"What did you do it for?" I asked him.

"I cut—the enemy—was it not?" said the P.P. in tones of high dudgeon.

You can't do anything with a person who mixes the simplest idiom of the British tongue in this manner. Whether he had mixed up cutting—in the sense of hooking it—with jabbing or not, I don't know.

Meanwhile we brought Towsy round with some water young Wharncliffe fetched in the P.P.'s cap. Towsy wasn't as dead as we thought, and seemed more surprised than anything when he opened his eyes. Uncommonly sulky, too, and ungrateful, for though we offered him two bob (in weekly instalments) and young Wharncliffe's belt as a sling, he

## ADVENTURE OF PERSIAN PRINCE

preserved a hostile demeanour and said he should let our headmaster hear of it, which he did, the Squire coming round next day, and the whole school being assembled and Topsy in his frowsiest temper.

That is really the whole story. The P.P. was removed shortly after, "In the hope" as Topsy said, "that in some sterner sphere he would learn the lesson of self-control and the civilised arts of peace, which alone would enable him, in the dim future, to benefit and ameliorate the condition of his own ancient and memorable country;" while "those who, instead of exemplifying the virtues of obedience and loyalty (being young Wharncliffe and I) to one who was a stranger within our gates" (the P.P.), got it jolly hot, in a manner that I will not describe. It is useless to expect gratitude from headmasters.

## THE SMOKE ON THE STAIRS

*1. 2*  
*language*  
*+ style of Bab.*  
*not del. applied*  
*to an English schoolboy*  
*story. Cf. "The Golden Age"*

IT would strike anyone, I should think, as considerably hard lines if, owing to making a slight mistake in cutting sticks from a tree, they had to have their lives endangered by the wilful sternness of a parent. Yet that is practically what happened to young Tod Wilton and myself a little time ago. We had cut the sticks for a useful enough purpose—namely an aeroplane, which we had invented the same morning. It contained several novel features which might have been patented if we had remembered them later on. But the excitement of the fire drove them from us.

Perhaps I ought to mention that I was spending part of the holidays at young Wilton's Pater's place; and it was chiefly because the morning was beastly rainy that we invented the flyer. We were both rather keen on the Tetrahedral system, only had to give it up, and come down to an improved box kite, because we were unable to find out what Tetrahedral meant, Mr. Wilton's Encyclopedia being quite out of date. If it had not been, we might not have wanted to cut the sticks from the tree in the orchard. So that even in this way you might call the whole thing Mr. Wilton's fault.

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It was at lunch time that he began talking about the tree and saying that it was going to illustrate Mendel's Law. Old Mendel, it appears, discovered that if you crossed pure stocks with others, a certain proportion of the offspring would never be anything but pure. This seems roughish on such offspring as would rather not resemble their pure parents too closely. Fatty Blake at school at once occurred to young Wilton and myself, and we decided to tell him about Mendel's Law when we got back, as he would undoubtedly be interested to learn that he was an illustration of it. He must be, because his father was a Fat Boy and so was his grandfather; whereas his two brothers are quite normal, and his sister not bad-looking but bony. If Old Mendel was right, there can be little doubt that when Fatty Blake marries, one of his sons will be a Fat Boy and a young hippopotamus grandson will play about his knees and learn from his lips how street urchins pursued him when he went out on a bicycle, and he jolly well had to put up with it, because he was too stout to make a spurt. But of course no girl may fancy him enough to marry him, though he is very good tempered especially after a feed of pastry.

Everybody was frantically interested in Mr. Wilton's description of the tree and expressed a wish to see it as soon as lunch was over. Young Tod and I were as keen as the rest, and only when we approached it did we apprehend that it was the

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one we had stripped of its boughs in order to get ribs for the kite. Mr. Wilton's face when he saw it revealed all.

"Who did this," he demanded in an unpleasant voice, and as young Tod instantly looked guilty, he went on, "I see. You Tod, and your friend, I suppose? You don't deny it?"

"No," said young Tod, briefly.

"But of course we are awfully sorry," I began. "And if we had known about Mendel we should never have done it. They don't seem to teach us anything really useful at school."

I fail to see why several people should have smiled at this, or why Mr. Wilton's genial face should have clouded still further.

"Indeed," he said. "But you must have learnt about Satan finding some mischief still? Tod has at any rate. Tod, you and your friend had better retire to your room for the rest of the day."

"All right, Pater," said young Tod, and, explanations being impossible with so many people about (there had been twelve to lunch, but the meringues had gone round), we went. I dislike that way of treating a guest myself, but it is no good making a fuss in a strange house. As a matter of fact, we should not have minded going a bit but for one thing: and that was that at 8 P.M. there was to be a trial of the new fire escape that Mr. Wilton had just bought. It was one of those canvas shutes—a jolly long one going from the attics to the ground,

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and pretty nearly as good as a toboggan at the Hippodrome.

At least it looked as if it would be when it came in a cart, but it hadn't been tried yet. Mr. Wilton had fixed 8 P.M. for everyone to have a whizz through it, by way of practice, so that if a fire broke out they would know what to do. Out of this practice it looked unpleasantly as if we had been done, and I said as much to young Wilton when we got upstairs.

"Perhaps, however, your pater will remember in time," I added.

"I don't know that he will. He seemed pretty shirty," said Tod.

"Well," I remarked, "I don't wish to say anything nasty about the parent of another——"

"He's all right really," said young Tod swiftly, with filial piety.

"I know he is," I said. "Only he isn't up to his usual form if he wants our lives to be endangered merely because he happens to feel nasty. Supposing a fire did break out and we got burnt. He'd be pretty sackclothly then."

"He may let us have a try to-morrow," said Tod.

"Not much use if it breaks out to-night," I replied.

"It won't," said young Tod. "It is sickening, though. We can't even get a glimpse of what they're doing with it from this side of the house."

"Couldn't we sneak into Mrs. Hartley's room?"



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I enquired, deferring to young Tod as being the host. "Her maid'll probably be there."

"I'd rather not," said Tod.

So there we sat gravelled, you might say, by old Mendel; and presently the joyful shouts and yells of those descending were wafted to us. We were too sick even to continue our dirigible, and not till Wilkins brought up tea containing much food value and but a couple of buns did we get a glimpse of the outer world. Tod then enquired how the shute had acted.

"Fine, Master Tod," said Wilkins. "Motors ain't in it for pace. It's buttered lightnin' . . . I come down with Mary myself. The gals was all a bit frightened at first. But they liked it after . . . all except Mrs. Primmer. Not for love or money she wouldn't try it. Thought there wasn't room maybe."

Mrs. Primmer is the Wiltons' cook: and the only light thing about her, as I have heard Major Culimore say, is her hand. I should get fat myself if I could make similarly eatable things.

"The Master tried everything, but she wouldn't budge," went on Wilkins. "And now she's certain there'll be a fire just becoss she wouldn't."

The words of Wilkins sank into me, but Tod only asked impatiently if we were going to be allowed down for dinner. Wilkins thought it doubtful, the tree having been the apple of Mr. Wilton's eye; and sure enough we lingered on, and no olive branch

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reached us. (That is the thoughtless way in which elders behave, often to their own undoing. Not that their young are keen on mischief, but that after long hours of flatness, a yearning to be up and doing and leave a hoofmark or so on the sands of time naturally asserts itself.)

"Look here," I said at last to young Wilton. "I've got an idea. It's a jolly good one. If you've got the pluck of a squirrel, we'll carry it out."

"What is it?" he asked.

His bored look that should never be seen in a youthful face turned to one of creditable and eventually of goggling interest as I unfolded my plan, and when I concluded—"It's your house, so I don't want to do it unless you agree. But it would be ripping fun," his sea-blue eyes were going round like tops.

"Let's," he said, and with animated features the young conspirators plotted far into the starry night.

Long, long ago this happened, and as I compile this little Memoir (writing perforce under my desk during the French hour lest the eagle eye of my Gallic instructor catch me at it), it all seems like a dream.

It was jolly real at the time however—which time was about midnight.

I have skipped the intervening hours because beyond our getting pretty impatient, nothing much happened. Dinner like tea was sent up to us, but,

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having described a couple of meals already, I shall not dwell on this. I tossed young Wilton for the red-currant jelly—of which there was not enough for two—and won it: and the cabinet pudding sufficed to stay his cravings. We shouldn't have minded some coffee in view of what was before us, but got instead a message that we were to retire to our beds at nine. We retired. But not to sleep. . . .

It was as the clock struck the midnight hour that we crept from our beds and in Indian file descended to the kitchen by the back stairs. We had heard Mr. Wilton say good-night to Major Culliemore at 11:30, so knew that all was well. Our only fear was that the kitchen fire would be out, but a hurried reconnaissance showed that it wasn't. The red embers burnt on the hearth and indicated pretty distinctly many a darkling black-beetle. Evading these, we sought in the kitchen cupboard for a couple of pails, and into these, as young Wilton held them, I ladled what was left of the fire with a frying pan. Then cautiously, having collected some greenstuff, brown paper and other fuel we made our way to the second landing (which is of stone) and set them down.

"Now then, young Tod," I said, "chuck the stuff on and don't yell till we get just outside our door."

Three moments later the dread cry of "fire" rang out through the sleeping house. Tod, who

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has a hooty alto, had given it, just as we slipped into our room; and the response was immediate. Doors opened, there was a shriek or two; and then bells began to ring. Almost before we could have expected it, our own door was opened, and Mr. Wilton hurried in, candle in hand. He was in his dressing-gown.

"Wake up, you boys!" he said. "There seems to be a bit of a fire downstairs. At least there's a good deal of smoke. It may mean fire or not. We'll get out first and see afterwards. So you'll have an opportunity to try the escape after all, eh? I thought at first it was you giving the alarm, Tod?"

"Did you, pater," said young Wilton. Luckily his teeth chattered, and Mr. Wilton thought he was a bit frightened, and tucking him under his arm led the way to the attics.

Though pretty experienced in bonfires and having planned the thing myself, I was astonished at the amount of smoke we had raised with our two pails. It swept up the stairs and along the passages in the chokiest way, so that one could hardly see who was who of the people scuttling for the fire-escape. Major Culliemore, who, it appears, had agreed to see that everyone was waked, was the last to turn up in the attic, driving in front of him at the double several of the maids arrayed in blankets.

"Is that everybody?" said Mr. Wilton, who

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with the aid of Wilkins had already dropped the fire-escape from the window.

"Yes," said Major Cullicmore, "so far as I can learn"——

"Then if you'll go down first, and hold the bottom open, I'll see them out"——

"Right!"

The Major shot down like an arrow, and Mr. Wilton made a short speech like a Captain in a ship-wreck.

"Silence, please," he said, "and listen! There's no occasion for anyone to be frightened or hurried. We all tried the escape this afternoon, and now we're going to try it again. The women will go first. Jane, you and Collins can start together. Quietly, mind. There's plenty of time for everyone."

Young Tod and I cheered him, because while we knew more about the fire than he did, he was jolly calm and collected in what might have been dire peril. Even the attic was coughy now with the smoke, and altogether it became pretty exciting to see the people shoot down. Outside you could see the garden in the starlight, and Major Cullicmore scooping people out at the bottom: and further away lanterns in the directions of the stables, which showed that the alarm had spread. There was no hitch at all in the escape, until it came to Mrs. Primmer's turn, and she began whimpering as soon as Mr. Wilton told her to go.

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"I dasn't," she said, "I dasn't . . . I dasn't"——

Mr. Wilton only raised his voice——

"Don't be silly," he said, and added to Wilkins, "you went down with one of the maids this afternoon. Take Mrs. Primmer now. Don't talk, Mrs. Primmer, you're going this instant"——

The pretty sick Wilkins dropped the arm of Mary the parlour-maid whom he had no doubt intended to go down with again, and crept into the top of the bag. Mrs. P. faintly moaning was shoved in alongside.

"Ready, Culliemore?" shouted Mr. Wilton. "Right . . . Go ahead, Wilkins!"

Wilkins went ahead for about fifteen feet, and Mrs. Primmer with him. They went in a slow dignified sort of way—quite unlike the others—and then there was a sudden stop. . . . For an instant nobody realised what had happened, and Mr. Wilton shouted down the bag——

"What's up, Wilkins?"

There was no reply from Wilkins save muffled groans, and we could only hear Mrs. Primmer repeating, "Oh Lord! Oh Lord! Oh Lord!; but it was soon clear enough what was the matter. They had stuck. (Wilkins afterwards explained that owing to her struggles Mrs. Primmer had got sort of doubled up on top of him, thereby bulging the bag sideways and preventing it from expanding below. As at the same time she had clutched

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Wilkins by the arms and hair, to prevent him slipping past her, he was also caught in the bulge and very nearly suffocated by her petticoats of which she had hurriedly donned five before leaving her room.)

It seems rather funny now—in fact young Wilton got a hundred lines the other day for suddenly laughing during Rep without being able to give a reason—but at the time of course it was somewhat serious, apart from the fact that Mary instantly got hysterics. For on the one hand Wilkins might get asphyxiated before help came, and on the other hand the bag might burst with their combined weights sticking there about thirty feet from the ground. Luckily, however, Major Cullicmore, suspecting how things stood, with the quickness of a cavalry leader thought of a remedy—"pour a jug of water down!" he shouted up to us, and Mr. Wilton did so. By a stroke of luck it came splash in Mrs. Primmer's face, so terrifying her that she kicked out and let go of Wilkins. Purple in the face the latter slid swiftly to the bottom of the bag, where as Major Cullicmore was helping him out, Mrs. Primmer followed so instantaneously that they were both knocked flat.

It was during the reaction that followed upon this, and while Mr. Wilton was trying to persuade Mary to enter the shute, that I tipped young Tod the signal which we had agreed on, and we both slipped from the room. Our object was a simple

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one—viz. to cut to the second landing, carry off the pails containing the cause of all the smoke back to the kitchen grate, and thereby remove the evidence of our guilt. Unfortunately, as I shall have to show, the full facts of the combustion were not known to us. We got an inkling of them when, snorting pretty hard (young Tod maintained later that he was already quite dizzy in the head, but he did not mention it at the time being too breathless, no doubt) we reached the second landing—we must have taken several minutes to get there. It felt like an orchid house full of London fog and we couldn't see the pails at all or feel them.

"Let's go back!" I shortly after heard young Tod say, but at that moment I barked my shins on something tinny. "Here they are," I said, and put my hand down on top of one of them. It was a pail sure enough; and I rather expected to be singed. Instead of that the thing wasn't even hot. "Is yours hot?" I said to young Tod, who was kneeling beside me as I could hear from his grunting.

"No . . . it's out," he said, and suddenly the truth flashed across me. These rolls of smoke, the hot air, and the hissy sounds we could now distinctly hear, weren't caused by our pails at all. Somewhere else, probably lower down, there was a real fire. I remember trying to explain this to young Tod, and feeling rather irked that he wasn't properly excited. For of course it was extremely ex-



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citing. I kept thinking so to myself, and wondering what we should do next. I suppose that why I sat down and kept wondering—instead of doing something—was because the smoke felt so beastly. I'd got my handkerchief out and stuck it over my mouth; and if I could have breathed properly that way, I might have sat there for ever. My head got so tight that I couldn't, and suddenly I dropped it and took a long breath. The result was simply awful, and I got to my feet staggering and flapping like an old trout just grassed.

"Come along," I said, angrily, and found young Tod wasn't there. At least he didn't answer, and I thought he'd gone, and began to plunge away from the pails. I hadn't taken two staggers before I fell over something soft. I put my mouth down on it to get a breath that wouldn't hurt and found it was young Tod, coiled up like a garden hose.

Smoke is the rummiest thing. I hadn't realised a bit that it was dangerous till that moment—only rather disagreeable in a soothing sort of way. Lying there, getting breaths out of Tod's prostrate form, I got into the beastliest funk. Suppose he was dead! A bit later I was advancing under him as though he were a Roman tortoise (Caesar mentions this article) and was butting at the bannisters with him as I made my way towards the attic. My legs felt like those of an aged armadillo fleeing before the prairie fire. And the fire was doing a beastly sprint, and my legs were getting hoarier

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and hoarier, and I hadn't the least idea where we were getting to, when . . . spunk . . . we were butting into the waistcoat of Mr. Wilton . . .

"Thank goodness!" he said, and no questions were asked until some time after when we had all slithered down the escape into the ripping coolness of the garden . . .

But for young Tod's conscience, ever his weak point and further enfeebled by the anguish of having to heave up smoke like a fire-eater until he recovered his senses, this story would not have been told. As it was he confessed with tears. We should have been more ragged over it than we were but for the rummy fact—proved beyond all doubt—that our pails had had nothing to do with the real fire. That had started—nobody knows how—in the library and it burnt itself out in the library too, owing to the exertion of the fire brigade from Westly, which arrived in record time. In fact all that young Tod and I had actually done was to give the alarm. So that Mr. Wilton ended by saying that he hoped we had learnt a lesson and by giving me a watch for "endangering Tod's life and then thinking better of it." Major Culliemore, who had been at school with Mr. Wilton and also with my father, said that in his opinion the whole thing was really another case of Mendel's Law, for he remembered the three of them doing something very similar. Mr. Wilton however seemed to have forgotten about it.

## ON THE RAFT

### I

**I**T was extraordinarily hot, the sky of that grinding blue men see in delirium, the sea with thick, smooth patches on its surface, as though barrels of molten fat had been poured into it and had failed to mix.

Between the planks of the raft, as it dipped and rose on some invisible motion that there was, an oily water came squelching up. The water looked like oil at least. Yet though scarcely a moment elapsed between its ooze-through and trickle-over, in that fraction of time the raft would be wetted and bone-dry again—so dry that to Baker's fancy the wood might have been warping.

The young man sat at one end of the raft, looking along it. He sat hunched up with his arms round his knees. His shirt was twisted over his head, and his coat hung down from it like a puggaree. Even so the sun was boring a hole in the middle of his spine. How Forbes, sprawled along the length of the raft on his back, could go on sleeping passed his knowledge. It was Forbes's turn to sleep right enough, and Baker did not grudge it.

Baker shifted his hunched position. He was

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thinking that people at home would not believe it if anyone told them he had seen a man's arm being grilled like a steak. People at home! What did they know, after all? Nothing. Why, they knew so little that you couldn't even begin to tell them of some of the things a man sees at sea. That storm, for instance, that had come up on the shallow sea—last night—it was last night—only last night, by God—and had pounded the *Jane Allington* into a hopeless wreck within half an hour—what could you tell them of that that would make them realise the terror of it? To think of the black smother of foam on which the other chaps had started on two rafts, after the old man had got swept from the bridge and the boats smashed, and they all thought the *Jane* could not stand being pounded ten minutes longer! Where were they now, those others? Probably nobody would ever know. And he and Forbes were on the raft, because old Forbes had persuaded him that it was best to stick to the ship anyway till she smashed up, better anyway to be drowned off something more than a bundle of sticks tied together in death's own hurry.

If only they could sail the raft, or a breeze come up and blow them ashore. It wasn't much of a shore to be blown to. Baker had a picture in his mind of its red-hot rocks fringed with white-hot sands, as he had seen it from the deck of the ship; and it was not a desirable picture for a parched, half-baked man. Still, it was better than the raft.

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How Forbes could sleep passed Baker's understanding. The young man himself felt that he couldn't rest till they were picked up; and with a kind of child-like feeling that there must be a sail in sight—because if there wasn't it meant death and such unimaginable things—he rose from his humped position to take a look round. It was not easy to stand upright on the raft without any practice. The thing lurched so, and the water bubbled up unexpectedly underfoot. You had to balance the raft as well as yourself when you stood up, and not get your feet caught in the cracks, or get so much side-spin on you, when you were avoiding these, that you didn't avoid a header.

Baker was very careful in this matter, and also in his scrutiny of the oily expanse of sea. He did not see anything ahead of the raft in the direction in which they were presumably drifting, since nothing is quite still on any sea; nor could he observe anything to starboard or to port. Having turned round on his heels to get a stern view, he saw that the distant sea also held nothing up to its horizon. The very near sea, on the other hand, did contain something.

The thing presented itself to Baker in a manner that seemed to him at first only curious. Bringing his eyes from the horizon which contained nothing, he caught sight of a thin furrow or wake of water travelling leisurely through the dead sea. It was strange for such a wake to be there at all. Seeing

## ON THE RAFT

how tranquil everything was he could not have believed that the raft left such a wake. What was stranger was the sudden perception that this furrow of water was travelling, not away from the raft, as a wake should, but towards it.

### II

The advancing wake travelled slowly, but very steadily, towards the raft. If it caught up—if—even while he rubbed his eyes to make sure he was not dreaming—both of the wake itself and of the cold tingle that went through his limbs—the thing had changed its direction and was going on a semi-circle that took it wide of the raft and outside Baker's view. That fact—for what it was worth—made him a modern once more—with the desire to explain a mystery rather than be afraid of it. As he began turning to follow its direction he was a reasonable being with all sorts of explanations crowding his brain. It couldn't be a current, of course, at all, much less an inverted wake. The latter was impossible, and currents, though they are strange things—to be found in all sorts of unexpected places—do not sheer off at sight of a boat. No, it must be a fish, or a shoal of fish. If a single fish it must be a big one, which had been frightened by the raft and circled to avoid it. Funny thing, Baker thought, as he steadied himself to turn round further to see if he could

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spot it vanishing, a raft must seem to a fish. Nasty thing, too. Like a steam-engine that has come blundering through a tropical country to the wild tribes inhabiting it.

The thought of the parallel occupied Baker's mind for exactly the few seconds that it took him to turn about, when he thought to see the furrow of water travelling far away ahead of them. Instead of that he became aware that again it had curved, and this time was travelling—on a narrower curve—not away from the raft at all, but back to it.

It was travelling more slowly still, however, much more slowly, and as the young man watched it the thing seemed to have stopped some fifty yards away. He was sure it had stopped indeed, though, but for a certain darkness of the water at that point, it had made itself invisible. Perhaps it had dived down to the bottom sea again, perhaps—suddenly and with incredible swiftness the furrow was moving, it had come up, and as Baker cried out, it had swept past the bows of the raft like an arrow.

"Sam!" he cried, excitedly.

Forbes raised himself on his elbow, drowsily.

"Eh, boy, what's that?"

"It's a shark—a big, beastly shark," said Baker. He was still standing up and quivering a little with the excitement of that incredible rush-past, and the older man looked at him doubtfully.

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"Feeling a bit hot?" he asked with gruff kindness.

"No—yes—I'm hot; but there's a shark there, I tell you! It came bang past us. Look at it—look!"

He pointed to where the wake of water was faintly visible on the great circle, and Forbes followed the finger.

"Well, it seems to have gone anyway," he said. "Better sit down—what's got you, anyhow?"

The young man was quivering again with the excitement of the thing.

"I thought not. It hasn't gone. It's coming back now. See?"

Forbes, lying on his elbow, still half incredulous, saw a sudden rush of water that came under the stern this time, almost bumping the raft, saw a dull grey gleam below, and steadied the craft just in time to prevent Baker, who had given an involuntary leap away from the stern, from overbalancing himself.

"Sit down, lad!" he said, sharply, and Baker sat down.

"Didn't you see it then?"

"Yes."

"Well, and wasn't it a shark?"

"No. I wish to God it was," said Forbes. He had got up on his knees and was fumbling at the spar which he had Baker lash to the logs in case they needed a mast. Baker watched him with an



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unpleasant sensation growing in his throat. He had all a sailor's superstition, and Forbes's utterance had brought up to his mind tales of sea-serpents and octopuses, and other terrors of the deep. Was it possible there were such things? He hardly liked to put the question, but he put it all the same.

"What do you mean? If it isn't a shark, what is it?"

Forbes didn't answer at once. He had got out his clasp-knife, and was cutting away at the rope that bound the pole to the raft.

"You might tell a chap what the thing is," said Baker, miserably.

The old man seemed so keen on getting hold of the pole. But you couldn't beat off a sea-serpent with a pole.

"I'll help, shall I?" he said, not getting his answer.

"You keep your eye on the fish," said Forbes. "It's the most infernal thing the sea breeds. I saw one once from a safe deck, Aden way, and I've heard stories of them that make sharks seem gentle. Keep your eye on it till I get this spar loose. It's a Red Sea skate—that's what it is."

To Baker's wrought-up state of mind the name came as a positive relief.

"Why, it's only a blooming big dog-fish after all, then," he said, breathing hard.

"It's a dog-fish," said the old man, "that'll come

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on board and help himself to your legs if it's feeling that way. Better keep 'em under you. Ha! that's better." He had loosed the stout spar, none too easy to use as bludgeon. "We'll see if it likes a knock next time it comes. I don't care for this sort of raft overmuch, but I'd rather we had it to ourselves than shared it with that devil. Do you see the wake of it?"

"Yes," said Baker, pointing. "It's gone off." To have had it named gave him a self-confident feeling that was very pleasant after his sick fright. "It's heard you, and it's frightened," he added.

Forbes shook his head.

"There's nothing frightens them," he said. "That's what I've heard, and that's why they're such terrors. Sharks are cowards. These skates aren't. An' they can turn twice as fast, and nip without lying over."

"Well," said Baker, carelessly, "it don't seem anxious to come again all the same."

"That's its trickiness," said Forbes. "Wait and see."

### III

It was the waiting that hurt Baker's feelings. Singularly enough the fish was holding off now that they had a weapon ready. They could see it making whorls in the water at a distance of some hundred yards, as though playing. In the water it might be cool enough for play (though it was tepid

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to the touch). On the raft, with the molten sun overhead, and no shelter at all, the two men never felt less disposed for a game. Baker shifted his sweating limbs constantly, and Forbes, who had gripped his bludgeon firmly at first, began to feel it relax in his moist hands.

"If it's a waiting game the brute wants to play," said Baker, "I reckon we'd better start watch and watch again. I wouldn't mind lying down a bit—not that I'm wanting to sleep—but just to show I'm not afraid of a fish."

"Well, here's your chance," said Forbes. "He's coming."

"Eh?"

A flurry of water, a huge grey revolting face snapping up over the edge of the logs, the thud of the pole on the raft which swayed and swam with water, and tipped horribly—that was the answer Baker got as he cried out and sprang to the other end of the raft. The skate was off again, lashing along in a fury.

"Missed the brute," said Forbes, with an oath.

"He wasn't so far from missing us, though," said Baker. He felt pale. Somehow this was more than he had bargained for. He had thought that knowing the thing for a fish he could not be frightened of it in the same way. He had never dreamed that a fish could frighten him. And yet it had, and the fear of it which had caused him to spring so suddenly to the side clung to him still, none the

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less because it shamed him. Why hadn't Forbes done something to it with that spar?

"What did you want to go and miss it for?" he inquired, a moment later, when he thought his throat was less choky.

Forbes looked at him.

"It ain't so easy to strike it," he said, "not with this stick. Have a try yourself, if you like. Then you'll see."

"All right," Baker said, sulkily, and took it. He felt safer now that he had the spar—not altogether safe, but safer. He was a lot quicker than the old man, and if he could hit the brute on the head or ram it down its ugly throat, perhaps it really would clear off.

"You've got to be quick with a fish like that," he said, explaining his thoughts to Forbes.

"Yes," said the old man. "Are you ready? It's coming."

So it was—coming like greased lightning. Baker had his pole ready, though. He would just wait for its head to appear above the water, and—with a sudden yell he sprang back, as the fish bored its heavy, cruel head on to the raft, submerging that side. He had hit too quickly—or was it too late, and missed it?—and dropped the spar. But for Forbes's quickness it would have gone overboard, and they would have been left defenceless.

"It ain't so easy," said Forbes, but not tauntingly. "I think I'd best keep the pole—eh?"

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"Yes," said Baker in a dull voice. "It ain't easy."

"Best sit down," said Forbes, "and not move more than you can help. See what it was trying for? To sink us on one side, so that we slide down. If I get a hit at it, you try and keep the raft balanced. See?"

"Yes," said Baker. "I—I feel faint like."

"It's the sun," said Forbes. "If we can keep the skate off it'll be better—a bit later. Hold on. It's coming."

### IV

It was very much later now. Forbes still had the pole, but he didn't know how long he had been jabbing away with it. The sun was still scorching away, attracted to the oily sea as by a burning glass. Baker had collapsed for the time being, and lay insensible. On the whole Forbes was rather glad of that. There only seemed the one possible end to it, and he was himself not struggling against it like a man now, only like a creature that kicks while it has breath. Talk of a man's wits. His wits seemed to have left him almost as much as Baker's. It was the fish that had the wits now. That was the chief horror of it—that in a way you might say it was endowed with reason. Forbes could see its plan as clear as his hand—had seen it for hours and hours; and that plan was to get so much of its weight on to the raft that the raft

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would for the moment be submerged, a part of its own fish element in which it could deal with its victims effectively. Its cunning was endless. It had worked out in that hideous flattened head that if it leapt wholly on the raft, it would be stranded high and dry. Probably the raft would support anything up to a ton's weight, laid flat across it. That fish with a devil's brain wasn't going to risk that. It knew a better way than that—the temporary sinking of the raft. It had begun by laying its head on board. It had tried that trick several times. Then its head and neck—then more of its grey dead weight. It did not go off now on great circles of rage. It kept its energy for this business of the sinkage, taking only short rushes at intervals, to get sufficient way on. Between whiles it rested alongside, flapping a sullen tail. It didn't seem to mind the blows that Forbes had dealt it. He had hit it several times, and might as well have tried tickling an elephant. It snapped at him—that was all. Forbes only kept jabbing away because he thought that there was a chance of blinding it. Only there was always less chance now. He hadn't the time to take aim. His chief work was to balance the raft, get to the edge as the brute's weight came over opposite. He was dully grateful for the fact that he was a heavy man. Fourteen stone ten last time he was weighed. He hadn't thought at that time that it would pay him because he was going to play see-saw with a skate. Baker's

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weight added would have made things a bit more hopeful, but nothing to count. The skate must easily outweigh the two of them; and once it had made up its mind to spread itself far enough on board, the end was there. It was a matter of what the first mate used to call dynamics. Put overweight on a raft, and it sinks. Very simple, but who'd have believed that a fish knew it?

There it was coming up now. The old man steadied himself at his end of the raft, and held the pole like a spear. The fish came slowly at first, then with a little rush that brought its night-mare head over the edge. Forbes moved back to balance it. He had done it so often—and they paused there *vis-à-vis* with Baker between them.

It was going to be different this time. The skate was sawing the sea behind it with its tail, propelling its own body along the raft. Its head and neck were well over now, and now the raft, with Forbes at its end, was tilting up more and more—Baker was beginning to slide already, and the horror of seeing him slip towards those devilish jaws roused the old man.

“Wake up, Bill!” he shouted. “Wake up! It’s getting us!”

To his amazement the young man who had seemed collapsed not only woke, but rose. The raft was at an angle of 45, with the water sliding over. Very gently the skate was flapping itself further on. A couple more flaps and it would have the raft over.

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In that moment the young man, staggering as if drunk—yelling hoarsely—went down towards the fish, and kicked it deliberately on the snout with his heavy boot. It was a severer blow than the fish had felt, and it had the effect of disconcerting it. With a fierce wriggling motion it backed off, and the raft tilted up into position.

“Damn it!” shouted Baker, and began chanting hoarsely some music-hall ditty of the day, and capering about the raft. He was beside himself, and Forbes saw that the fish was coming back again, and he was very tired.

## V

What amazed the officer in charge of the boat that put off from the S.S. *City of Parma* to pick up the men that they had seen on the raft miles off was that the two poor fellows seemed to have no conception of the sun's heat. One was jabbing away with a pole at some invisible object, the other dancing and capering up and down. Singing, too, it became apparent, in a faint, hoarse voice that was barely above a whisper. Neither made a sign of seeing the boat's approach, and, as the officer brought her bows up almost against the raft, the old man made a feeble jab at it with his spar.

“It's coming back, Baker,” he said, and the younger man went on singing and capering.



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"What's the matter, old chap?" said the officer, kindly, but the old man did not reply. He only jabbed feebly at the sailors who stepped on to the raft and lifted him carefully into the boat, and the other one sang at them.

"Touched by the sun, both of 'em," said the officer. "Wonder how they came to be here, and what they think they're up to?"

"Seem kind of shoving something away from them," said one of the sailors.

"Yes—but what?" said the officer. "Nothing to shove at here."

They all took a look round without noticing anything that could account for the shipwrecked men's strange conduct.

As they pulled back to the *City of Parma*, one of the sailors observed a wake of water that seemed travelling away into the distance.

"That's a funny sort o' thing, sir," he said, nodding towards it as he pulled.

"Only a fish, I fancy," said the officer, not paying much attention to it.

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**S**HE came to be known on the boat as Madame Bluebeard before we were two days out from Calcutta. No doubt this was largely due to the fact, spread by some busybody, that she had married three husbands and survived them. I do not think that this past zeal for marriage would in itself have procured her the title. After all, some people with the best intentions in the world have a run of ill-luck, and Mrs. Mandaford might have been one of these.

It was her appearance that made the name so suitable. Not only was she enormous, a colossal figure of a woman who dwarfed the biggest man on board and suggested that she could pick up a couple of us in either hand, but she wore at times a most terrific frown. Seeing it, we felt that if she did pick a couple of us up and were feeling annoyed at the time she would not hesitate to drop us overboard.

Personally I thought her smile even more alarming, and I know that Colonel Gregory, once she had beamed at him in return for some small piece of civility—placing her deck chair for her in some sheltered spot—fled in haste to the smoking-room.

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"I call you people to witness," he said, as he sank into a seat, "that I'm stopping here for the rest of the voyage."

"Why so, Colonel?" asked one of the men present.

"Because she's looking for a fourth, and, by Jove, she'll have him, too."

He rang for a peg, and cut into a bridge four with trembling fingers. Yet he was an elderly bachelor, marriage-proof, you would have said, and not devoid of courage. He had seen service on the Frontiers and also in Somaliland, where, by the way, the Dervishes run large.

His example was followed by most of the bachelors who could stand an equal amount of smoke and heat, but there were times, especially in the Indian Ocean, when they had to come out, and—as the Colonel said—run the blockade. Married men like myself did not so greatly fear Mrs. Mandaford's awe-inspiring affability. We felt that we had in front of us, as a screen and protection against forcible remarriage, all the authority of the Church and State. Besides, she sorted us out into the married and unmarried, the goats and the sheep, with an infallible accuracy. Several of us were travelling single, but she left us alone. I suppose there is something about a married man that distinguishes him. A joyous tranquillity, is it? A look of having passed the worst and emerged? The appearance of a miner who has found gold,

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or of one that knows that for him there is no gold to find?

Anyhow she knew.

Gradually, but in a very obvious way, she began a weeding process among the bachelors. The skill with which she set aside the undesirables! The knowing ones were rejected first, then the reckless. She had brought them down to half-a-dozen within as many days. Then to three—to two—to one. We had all had a presentiment who the one would be.

He was a Mr. Luptons, a little man of course. He had been in the salt Revenue in India and was retiring on a pension. He intended, he told me, to do a little fruit growing in England to keep him occupied; and because he had few friends there, and no relations to speak of, he was bringing with him his native bearer, Peter. I think Peter gave his master away as much as anything. To begin with Peter was a Bengali and a Christian, and strict Sahibs in India do not have such for bearers. They are too apt to steal, they say. Also they are almost invariably of the lowest caste, and bearers are best when they belong to a high caste. You do not want a sweeper about your person. Generations of a dog life have made him impervious to cleanliness and courage—virtues the Sahib hankers after. The deduction therefore to be made from Peter was that Peter's master must be of a lenient not to say soft disposition. I do not con-

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tend that Peter had all the failings of his type. He was always in spotless white linen when he came into the cabin I shared with Mr. Luptons. And that he was at least faithful I shall have cause to show. Only, if Mr. Luptons had been a strong-willed Sahib, he would never have engaged him.

Perhaps it was obvious, without Peter, that strength of will was not Mr. Luptons' leading feature. A thin dried little man who looked as if he had lived on salt as well as by salt for many years, with absurdly small features and large eyes, he had the most apologetic manner I have ever seen in a man. He had lost a good deal of the hair on his head and still more of the intelligence that once, no doubt, reposed beneath it; and I suppose it was owing to the latter circumstance that for quite a long time he remained unaware that Mrs. Mandafor had marked him down or that the other bachelors on board regarded him as their scapegoat—as it were the Jonah to be thrown to this whale.

Peter saw. Often during those long days in the Red Sea, while the ship drove through the still water chequered with oily currents, and Mr. Luptons, all unconscious of his doom, sat blinking landward at the burning rocks and white hot sand, making polite answers at intervals to Mrs. Mandafor's exacting conversation, the sallow Indian would steal up behind and watch them with an expression of excruciating melancholy. I fancy he

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foresaw the time when this lady would be his master's ponderous *memsahib*, who knew not Peter, or—if she did come to know Peter—would make things uncommonly unpleasant for him. Few bearers welcome the prospect of a *memsahib* at any time. She has too many idle moments in which to poke about the house. But I sympathised with Peter.

It was just before we entered the Canal that Mr. Luptons became uneasy about Madame Bluebeard. He came down into our cabin rather late that night—he had been chatting with her—and, having apologised to me for turning on the light, began upon the subject that was to be so close to his heart.

"That Mrs. Mandaford . . ." he said. "You'll forgive me talking at this time of night?"

"I'm not a bit sleepy," I assured him. "What about Mrs. Mandaford?"

"A splendid figure of a woman," he said, "if I may be excused for mentioning a lady's figure. You are a friend of hers?"

"No," I said.

"But you've spoken to her, of course?"

"Very little."

"Really? You surprise me. She is so very affable—and to me of all people. It is very kind of her."

"Perhaps you have tastes in common," I suggested, mischievously.

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"Oh, no," he said very quickly. "I mean—I am really a person without any tastes. Mrs. Mandaford sustains the greater part of the conversation."

"Interestingly?" I asked.

He put down the brushes with which he was smoothing his thin fluff, and sighed.

"I hardly know what to say," he said; "I am such a poor hand at it myself that I don't like to seem critical. If I might venture, I should describe Mrs. Mandaford's conversation as a trifle too sentimental."

"Sentimental," I repeated. "That colossus of a widow."

"My dear sir," he said deprecatingly. "Scarcely a kind description, is it? And perhaps I am wrong about her. I am so devoid of sentiment myself that perhaps that is why I am afraid of it."

"Oh, you're afraid of it, are you?" I said, hardly able to keep from laughing.

He gave me an appealing look.

"It is so difficult with ladies, or so it seems to me. I am afraid of not responding in the proper key—of jarring."

"I see," I said.

"Or what would be worse," he went on anxiously, "of seeming to agree with things with which I do not, and cannot, agree. It is so extremely difficult with ladies."

"But what on earth," I inquired, "are these  
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topics that require so much discretion from you?"

He had some difficulty in explaining, but I gathered that she had begun to ogle him quite obviously.

"She seems to feel that voyages are apt to be so romantic. She says that one meets twin souls on board. More than once she has spoken of the curious way in which people who have never met before become engaged in quite a few days." He shivered slightly as he stressed the last words.

"I suppose they do," I said.

"Yes—but—but I am not myself a marrying man. I shall never marry. I once thought——" He paused, and I thought he was going to reveal one of those stories which people think are romances, but are, as a rule, only most pathetic fallacies. He did not, and I like the little man the more for it, though I failed to see how he was to be helped out of his dilemma. The few efforts that I did make to intervene between him and Madame Bluebeard's sentiment were unavailing. I used to go up to them and point out the mirages that were to be seen across the desert as we moved up the Canal. Or I would dilate on the utility of the camels that hove into view among the sand dunes, carrying bright-coloured riders or heavy bags of sand to strengthen the embankments. But one man cannot do all the talking for more than a few minutes at a time even to save his brother's soul, and neither Mrs. Mandaford nor Mr. Luptons sup-



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ported me. By the time we had reached Port Said he appeared to belong to her.

You know that dull white city on the edge of the drab desert, with its wide shops overhung by latticed balconies and its unwindowed drinking taverns and arid boulevards haunted by all the half-bred scum of a half-way country? Too tawdry to be Western and too dull to seem like the East, it lacks interest except for those who like to buy gorgeous Oriental wares imported straight from Birmingham. When a boat anchors, the big impudent Arabs come climbing on deck with bales full of every kind of bargain from nougat to carpets. There is also a conjuring boy who comes—a glib dusky boy with a Western patter and an Eastern *insouciance* that usually bring a crowd round him. The crowd on this occasion, however, was biggest, I think, round the group consisting of Mrs. Mandaford, Mr. Luptons, and a one-eyed Mohammedan who was trying to make Mr. Luptons buy some of his Egyptian scarves—all net and beaten silver—evidently for Mrs. Mandaford's use. It was a rich scene, the copper-coloured merchant draping his glittering wares round Madame Bluebeard's expansive shoulders, she coyly wondering which of the flimsy things most became her, Mr. Luptons dully smiling a fixed smile at each and all.

He bought two, a white one and a black, at an exorbitant price, and Mrs. Mandaford kept them on her knee for all the ship to see until we sailed.

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Everybody concluded after this exhibition that Mr. Luptons' fate was sealed, and I expected him to tell me so in the cabin that night. But all he said was——

"Are there sharks in the Mediterranean as well as in the Red Sea?"

He did not speak after I had reassured him, and lay with his eyes fixed vacantly on the porthole while I undressed. We had a bit of a tossing that night, and in the morning Mr. Luptons was ill. He was worried about this for my sake, but still more, evidently, because he feared that Mrs. Mandaford would think he was malingering if he did not get up. I strongly advised him not to, and he promised to remain in his berth.

"If you will be kind enough to let Mrs. Mandaford know that I am not quite the thing?"

"Mrs. Mandaford?" I affected surprise, but he was not to be pumped.

"If you please. I was to read to her to-day."

"Perhaps she is ill too," I suggested.

"I am afraid—I mean, I think she is an excellent sailor," said Mr. Luptons.

I found that she was, and stoutly immobile in her usual place after her usual breakfast.

"Mr. Luptons ought to pull himself together," she said severely, after I had given my message.

"He seems far too depressed," I said.

At that she looked me up and down most suspiciously. "I think you are mistaken," she said.

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"All that Mr. Luptons needs is female society. Luckily in future he will get it—we are engaged to be married."

"Happy Mr. Luptons!" I murmured, too taken aback by her self-possession to say more. But I finished the tag as soon as I had got to a safe distance. "If only he knew his happiness."

Halfway down the deck I almost knocked into the only other lady who had showed herself. She was a Mrs. Simeon, a charming person whose slender figure and sympathetic way made her the strongest possible contrast to Madame Bluebeard. I think it was the force of the contrast that gave me the idea of consulting her.

"May I?" I said as I sat down beside her after handing her to a chair. "I think I am like Mr. Luptons—in need of some female society."

"Is Mr. Luptons?" she said.

"Mrs. Mandaford has just informed me so. Also that he will shortly get it, as they are going to be married."

"Poor little man!" she said, and laughed merrily. Then she saw me looking serious. "But what's the matter with you? You're not jealous, are you? Or is it that you don't think they'll be happy?"

"I think it'll be tragedy," I said. "That's why I've come to you to ask if you can't find a way out of it for him."

She would not take me seriously at first.

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"Talk of a woman meddling!" she said. "You men are much worse. And meddling in a love affair of all things."

"It's not," I said, stoutly.

"How do you know?" she insisted. "Love is a very funny thing. I've known men——"

"Oh, I daresay *you* have," I said. "But this is different. It's a tragedy. For the credit of your sex you ought to help him. Think of that woman. All the men on board call her Madame Bluebeard."

"Men are gossips," she said. But I think she was a little impressed. "I tell you what," she went on after a little pause and screwing of eyebrows. "If it's a certainty that the little man has been driven into it against his will, I'll try and help him out of it. But we must be sure of that. No guesswork. He'll have to state his unwillingness."

"He will," I prophesied.

"Tell me when he does," she said.

As it turned out, his patience and sense of chivalry staved off the confession for a day or two, nor was it till we had passed through the Straits of Messina that he spoke. Ours was one of the first big boats to go through after the earthquake, and as everyone was busy looking through glasses at the strewn heaps of stone and dust that once were lovely Southern cities, the chief officer joined a little group of us.

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"There's the strangest feature of the whole thing," he said, pointing with his finger to a patch of smooth water on the port side.

"What's that?" said Mrs. Simeon.

"That's where Charybdis used to be. Scylla's opposite. The earthquake has wiped the whirlpool out of existence."

Certainly it was strange. Of that whirl of waters that had sucked down the ships of legendary heroes, galleys from Tyre, slave-rowed Athenian triremes, there was no trace left. Yet, as the chief officer said, it had been a real thing. He himself only a few months back had seen a big liner turning in it as helpless as a cork.

"Well, the earthquake did one good thing," said Mrs. Simeon.

"Wonderful!" murmured Mr. Luptons.

I do not know if Mrs. Mandaford, who was sitting close by in her usual place, disapproved of his having left her to come and stare with the rest of us, but she intervened at that point.

"I daresay," she said ponderously, "that for all we know earthquakes do a lot of good. People want to be shaken up now and then."

"Oh, I don't know about that," said Mr. Luptons, quickly and nervously.

"Exactly. People don't know," said Mrs. Mandaford, and he retired from the unequal contest. He must have brooded on her words, for that same night, without any pumping from me, his

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confession came out with a rush. He had made a mistake, he said, in regard to his engagement. Could I as a married man and a man of the world advise him as to a way out of it? I told him that I had seen it all coming, at which he seemed surprised. I told him that a woman's advice was what he needed more than a man's, and with his permission I would consult Mrs. Simeon on his behalf. He agreed. He was so miserable he would have agreed to anything, and Mrs. Simeon was touched.

"Tell Mr. Luptons," she said to me, "not to worry. Before he goes on shore at Marseilles I shall want to speak to him. He's not getting off there altogether, is he?"

"No, we're all going round by sea to London, I believe," I said.

"That's right," said Mrs. Simeon. "I've got a lovely plan."

She would not tell me what it was until she had consulted the chief officer, who was a great friend of hers and a humorist. I could not help thinking that his hand as well as hers was obvious in the plan when I heard what it was. It certainly had the merit of simplicity, and my only part in it was to persuade Mr. Luptons not to fail at the critical moment. Briefly, the plan was this. About half an hour before we left Marseilles, by which time it would be dark, Peter was to fall overboard, and after a moment's natural hesitation Mr. Lup-

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tons was to dive to his rescue. Neither was to be heard of again.

"Unless, of course, Mr. Luptons is an idiot," Mrs. Simeon explained. "You see, what will happen is that the French rowing-boat which the chief officer says he can easily have in waiting, will instantly pick them up in the dark and land them. On board, we shall be in a great stew. We shall throw over lifebelts and shout to the port boats to pick them up. After about half an hour of great confusion we shall have to sail, leaving word with the Port authorities what to do with the bodies when they are picked up. If Mr. Luptons is wise he will go and grow his fruit in British Columbia. Can you persuade him?"

"I think so," I said, and did—after some trouble.

And now the scene shifts to the Port of Marseilles at night. I wish I could reproduce in words the effect of the long dark wharves, the lights glittering from the hillside city, the ship's deck quiet, save for an occasional gliding Lascar and the murmur of passengers as they sat in their chairs and talked their after dinner talk. Mr. Luptons had dined on shore with Mrs. Mandaford, and came on board rather late, staggering under an enormous cardboard box.

"The latest French hats?" asked Mrs. Simeon, pleasantly, as they came by us. Mrs. Mandaford nodded and walked on as if she were going down

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to her cabin. Mr. Luptons came to a stop, he was pale and did not look like the hero he was intended to be.

"You're ready, are you?" said Mrs. Simeon.  
"No repentance?"

"N—no," he said, shivering slightly.  
"Peter——?"

"Peter's ready," I said. "So's the boat."

"Is it to be now?" asked Mr. Luptons.

"Yes," said Mrs. Simeon with decision, and nodded to me.

Looking round to see that I was unobserved, I strolled over to where Peter was crouched, unspeakably dismal and prepared for his fate, I suspect, with opium. I tapped him on the shoulder.

"I must drown now?" he said simply, coming to his feet with a salaam. "The Sahib wishes it?"

"The Sahib wishes you to go overboard now," I said. "You will not drown. He will save you. There is the boat." I pointed to where it lay, dimly visible a few yards from the ship. "Go down to the lower deck, and when no one is looking, jump into the water. You will make a loud splash and the Sahib will come after you."

I left him, a little doubtfully, but within two minutes the splash of him was distinctly audible. I was leaning conveniently on the rails just above, and I turned my head to see that Mr. Luptons, who had taken my chair, started up nervously but sat back again.



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"It's your bearer," I cried. "You're not going to let the poor fellow drown, are you?"

"No, no," said Mr. Luptons, and I saw Mrs. Simeon whisper to him.

At that he came trotting over, and the next moment he too was struggling in the black water.

"Good!" I said to myself, throwing a lifebelt overboard, and was horrified to see Mrs. Mandafoord suddenly appear from the companionway. She came straight at me——

"Who is it?" she cried. Already there were shouts of "man overboard," and people were rushing about.

"Mr. Luptons," I said. "He's gone to save Peter."

"And aren't you going to save him? You're his friend? No, you're a coward, I see."

I shrank back dismayed. A man doesn't care to be taxed with his cowardice, even if he knows that it is diplomacy. I shrank back, but before I could gather my wits to make an answer, a miracle had occurred. Madame Bluebeard, with some gymnastic effort of which I should have deemed her incapable, had flung herself over the rails after her betrothed. A great sousing noise showed that the sea had received this brave woman . . .

Again I have to leave to the imagination the scene that followed. It was confusion twice confounded, full of much rushing up and down, shouting of directions and sacrificing of lifebelts. In the dark-

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ness Mrs. Simeon and I sat and quaked. What if somebody had been drowned? . . . Not till nearly twenty minutes later were we relieved. Then to the side of the ship lined with excited passengers there pulled a boat manned by French sailors and bringing with it Peter, a damp white bundle of shivers and chattering teeth, Mr. Luptons limp and streaming, and Mrs. Mandaford wet but undismayed. The two men were put on board first by her orders; afterwards she came, Amazonian from the foam. Mrs. Simeon and I exchanged a despairing glance and joined in the cheers and clapping that greeted her.

"Hot blankets for all!" she said, and stalked off to her own cabin.

I turned to Mrs. Simeon——

"Well?" I said.

"She's got him," returned that lady, "and I'm not sure that she doesn't deserve him. I only hope and trust that that little man hasn't given us away by telling her the whole conspiracy."

"Good Heavens!" I said, "I never thought of that. I think I shall go and see."

I went, inwardly afraid, but I was destined to more surprises than one that day. As I entered our cabin Mr. Luptons rose in his berth, held out both hands and said——

"I shall never be grateful enough to you."

"What on earth for?" I asked.

"For being the means of showing me the great

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happiness in store for me. Sir," he went on fervently, "I am a wretched unimaginative man, and I am ashamed to own that even after I had won her, I did not sufficiently appreciate her."

"Mrs. Mandaford?" I interjected, to make sure.

"Yes," said Mr. Luptons ecstatically. "Yes. The noblest woman in the world! And the bravest. I told her so in the boat."

"You didn't, I suppose, mention," I began cautiously, "our little——"

"Plot?" said Mr. Luptons. "No. I shall never do that. It would spoil the romance."

"The romance?" I echoed, and added hastily, "yes—of course."

But Mr. Luptons was not heeding me. "It is such a romance as I have never dreamt of," he said thoughtfully, "to have a heroine for my wife. She has promised to marry me as soon as possible after landing."

"Heartiest congratulations," I said, and turned to go, for I was keeping Mr. Luptons half out of his bed. Then a thought struck me. "About Peter?" I asked.

"My future wife says that she will never willingly allow me to part from Peter—if he can stand our climate. You see, but for him it would never have happened. He is part of the romance."

"Quite so," I said. There was nothing else to say.

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### I

**I**T was Lady Crummerton's idea to get up the amateur theatricals which have so much to do with this story—in aid of some society for propagating something. I forget exactly what was to be propagated, but it was something charitable. Amateur theatricals have a good deal to do with charity in one way and another. I undertook to stage-manage the affair, not because I knew anything about stage-managing, but because it was a choice between that and writing the play, and it occurred to me that it would be more charitable if I did not write the play.

"You see," I explained, "writing plays is like the violin—if you've never tried."

Lady Crummerton nodded.

"Perhaps you are right," she said. "George will have to write the play then. He is literary."

"Very," I agreed.

George Courage, junior's, letters to the *Times* on the dangers to one's luggage, when travelling in Italy, from brigands and railway officials, are notorious among his friends.

"He is the very man," I added.

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"And you will stage-manage?" asked Lady Crummerton.

"Certainly," I said as warmly as I could. Stage-managing is a little like the violin, too. But I have always flattered myself upon possessing a faculty for organisation; and self-reliance, it seemed to me, should go a long way. Besides, the theatricals would be all the more amateur.

"Certainly," I repeated; "with pleasure. If you'll ask George to let me have a look at his MS. when it's ready, I'll see to the rest."

"Then we'll consider that settled," said Lady Crummerton, with a sigh of relief.

This was early in November, when Lady Crummerton was already beginning to worry about the house-party she meant to have down at the Manor House for Christmas. Wimperley, the adjoining town, though charmingly situated for the Pottery district (Sir Thomas Crummerton is a Potter Prince) cannot be called gay, and amateur theatricals partially, if not entirely, solved the question of amusements. George's play was to be acted in short by members of the house-party, who, what with rehearsals and so forth, would find themselves fully occupied. The only difficulty that remained, as Lady Crummerton wrote to explain a couple of days later when I got back to town, was, as to whether Courage would provide suitable parts and enough to go round. I gathered that, like myself, he had accepted his commission with pleasure, and my hostess wrote:

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"I am sure it will be a nice play. George has such nice feelings. I am only wondering a little if everybody will have a *really pleasant* part. I think you know most of the people coming, and I leave it to your usual tact. Of course Hesketh *must* be the Princess—if there *is* one. You will be able to arrange that with George. Mr. Heron and Mr. Proudley will both be glad to take *good* parts."

There was a good deal of the letter, for Lady Crummerton never spares her excellent note-paper; and a postscript to this effect:

"I find Sir Thomas has invited Harry Wilton, but I do not think he cares for acting."

Between the lines this read—to one who was a friend of the family like myself—that Lady Crummerton was divided in her mind as to whether she should, on behalf of her niece, Miss Hesketh Windover, favour the attentions of Mr. Rimney Heron or Mr. Lee Proudley, both of whom, as I happened to know, were interested competitors; whereas, she was emphatically dead set against encouraging Wilton in any shape or form. I like Wilton well enough, but did not quite see what I could do in the matter. Moreover, a stage-manager, except when he is acting himself, should be entirely dispassionate. Accordingly I left Wilton outside the scheme of things, and wired to Courage—

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*"Re Tragedy. Heroine must be Princess. Two leading men's parts imperative. Duke and bandit, drawing-room bandit would do—if sufficiently in love with Princess. Must both have a good look in. About fifteen other parts."*

I guessed that Courage's thoughts, if he could concentrate them in the direction of the drama, would turn to a brigand of some kind, and was confirmed in my intuition by his return——

*"Curious coincidence; had thought of Marquis and brigand chief both in love with Posanella, daughter of Archduke Archibald of Lampadia. Will this do? Play romantic, not tragic; sticks a little. Not bad."*

It seemed to me that an Archduchess-apparent would undoubtedly do, and could be entitled Princess, for short. As for the romantic tone of the play, I was not certain that Courage was quite the man for it. But, then, tragedy is also considered difficult to write, and he was sure to be moral. I said as much on a postcard.

## II

Courage's MS., which I read in the train on my way down to Lady Crummerton's, afforded me more pleasure than anything I could have got for sixpence at the bookstalls. It was entitled "The  
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Missing Princess," and the parts that had stuck were perhaps a little obvious. But the romance was the thing. I cannot convey it in a few words any more than, for that matter, Courage could, but if you can imagine a man whose principal literary achievements have been the denunciations, in Johnsonian periods, of all the hotel-keepers and railway officials whom he encountered on his continental travels, embarking suddenly upon a high-toned romantic drama in three acts, with, as *dramatis personæ*, a wicked marquis; a virtuous bandit; a long-winded archduke; Posanella, daughter of the same, a judicious mixture of Mrs. Browning and G.P.R. James; and a collection of minor characters out of the Gaiety, so to speak, by a Greek tragedy, you have some exiguous idea of the romance. Lampadia belonged to no martial time or kingdom, though Courage in a foreword spoke of the period. This interior of a castle hall (three Chippendale chairs, one antique cupboard, door L.) changing to a moor (oak trees, sweet smell of cowslips, sheep invisible in the dusky distance) comprised its scenic effects.

I was hardly prepared for the shower of questions that greeted my arrival at the Manor House. Lady Crummerton was dispensing tea in the hall, and it seemed to me that most of the *dramatis personæ* had arrived. Miss Windover was there, receiving crumpets from Heron and several other men. Heron, I knew, a tall thin man with a fair



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moustache drooping down to his chin, which drooped in turn into a tight collar, and knees which always seemed to be feinting at one another. I had already decided that Heron should be the chief of the bandits.

"Rude and an outlaw—what reck I of an Archduke's curse? The teeth of this dotard gnash at me in vain. S'blood!" (*à propos* of "s'blood," Courage had wanted to know whether it was all right with ladies present. He said that a brigand, however noble, could not mince his words, and that "s'blood" seemed to belong to the period. I had assured him that Heron would make much worse language sound like an amiable politeness.)

There was a short, stout, red-faced man among those offering Miss Windover crumpets, who, I felt sure, would be a success as the polished but meretricious marquis.

"Now, Mr. Cradford," demanded Lady Crummerton as I shook hands; "is it good?"

"Splendid," I said, accepting a cup of tea.

"How nice," she said. "I wasn't quite sure if George could do it. And you really like it?"

"If Tree could get hold of it," I said emphatically, "it would be another 'Eternal City.'"

"Dear me," said Lady Crummerton; "do you hear that, Hesketh?"

Having attracted general attention by this remark, she continued—

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"And now you must tell us who is going to be who. We're all so very anxious to know——"

"Hear, hear," said Heron.

"Though, of course, Sir Thomas and I have determined not to take a part."

"Well," I said, setting myself down judicially, "to begin with the Princess—I was going to ask Miss Windover if she'd undertake it."

"I'm sure she will. Hesketh, Mr. Cradford wants you to be a princess in George's play."

"Who is," I explained, "the heroine, loved by the marquis, but in love with the chief of the bandits—or brigands—as George prefers to call them."

"Certainly," said Miss Windover, quite self-possessed.

"The marquis and the bandit chief," I proceeded, "are both leading parts. The marquis gets in most of the love-making."

"Oh," said Lady Crummerton, doubtfully.

"But the bandit wins in a canter in the last act."

"I see," said Lady Crummerton.

"And I think Heron's the man for the bandit."

"I'm sure he is," said Lady Crummerton promptly——

"Why?" demanded Miss Windover.

I thought that, considering everybody was listening, it was rather an awkward question for a girl

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of her perspicuity to have put, but I evaded it with some skill.

"Why not?" I said, "Heron's the sort of man I have always fancied might have become a bandit—a high-minded bandit—if he hadn't been born, so to speak, a J.P. And with a little burnt cork on him, even now, any one would think he'd been firing ricks."

Heron smiled uncertainly.

Miss Windover remarked—

"Do brigands fire ricks?"

"Ricks and pistols," I said smoothly, "it's the sort of thing, dashing, you know. What do you say, Heron? Is it in your line?"

"I daresay I could manage it," said Heron, modestly. "Top boots, eh? With a stiletto down 'em?"

"That's it," I said. "Right, you're the bandit then; and you win the heart of Miss Windover, Pomponella, I should say."

"Charmin'," said Heron.

"But only in the last act," I reminded him, by reason of the marquis. "Any one volunteer for the marquis—high lineage, treacherous mind, white teeth and a leer?"

The pause that ensued was broken by Lady Crummerton, who said deprecatingly—

"Don't you think, Mr. Proudley, that you——"

"Harry Wilton hasn't come yet," broke in Miss Windover.

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"Oh, but he hasn't got a leer, my dear," said Lady Crummerton decidedly, "and I don't think he acts. Mr. Proudley *do* take the part, it would be such a charity."

Mr. Proudley, who I rejoiced to see was the red-faced young man, could hardly do less than accept after this well-turned compliment.

"There is still the archduke," I observed. "Elderly, gouty, inexorable. Perhaps Wilton would do for that?"

"Oh, I think that Mr. Meek would like a part. Wouldn't you, Mr. Meek?" said Lady Crummerton.

A small mild person who was present blushed at this invitation, and protested in vain against his appointment to the honourable post of archduke. I put down his name accordingly, and continued rapidly—

"We want a handmaid, Priscilla—who dances a tarantella in the second act: a duenna—not much to do except look sour—the only part that will really require acting (I said this so gracefully that a pretty girl at once offered herself). A janitor—grand-daughter of janitor in love with one of the crowd, I'd forgotten the crowd. We shall want at least seven for the crowd, and a few bandits. If we can settle them now, we can get the costumes fixed up in our minds and begin ordinary rehearsals to-night."

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These parts were filled in with more or less readiness.

"There, the society really will be grateful to us," said Lady Crummerton, humbly appreciating her efforts. "And I think it's too kind of you and George, Mr. Cradford."

"Not at all," I said on behalf of myself and the play-wright. "We like it immensely."

### III

I need not dwell very long on the rehearsals, except to say that there was something original about them, even for amateurs. Perhaps this was because I insisted that there should be no appeal from the stage-manager's directions, which were mostly in the nature of experiments—experiments in the effects of colour on the human face, in the effect of various stage-walks considered appropriate to a bandit, a marquis, an archduke, etc., and in the effect of various intonations, considered by the stage-manager proper to those parts, but invented, it must be confessed, on the spur of the moment, and with a view to strengthening the romance. I was glad to learn that none of the cast, unless it was the duenna, had ever acted before. This made it easier to invent pretexts to cover obviously incongruous directions. A point I always dwelt on, when faction arose, was that the difference between things as they appeared on the stage and

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in the auditorium was hardly credible. This usually had its effect.

There were, however, a few rebellions. The bandit for example objected to burnt cork being rubbed on his tow-coloured moustache (which certainly altered him by daylight) at any rate, before the night of the performance, but I overbore him. The marquis was decidedly more obstreperous, and flatly refused on two occasions to leer as directed. I cut out a portion of his love-making scenes, which brought him to his senses. The Honourable Adolphus Meek was on the second night almost suffocated in his beard, and had to be rescued by the crowd. His bearing suggested gout or some physical disability well enough, but no one would have known that he was inexorable.

Courage, too, who came down several times from town to see how his play was progressing, required a good deal of humoring. In the interests of the Propagating Society, I was compelled to make several excisions, and these, it seemed, were Courage's *pieces de résistance*. He was particularly obstinate about the skirt-dance which I substituted for the tarantella in the second act. He said that if the period was not considered, the play would be ruined, and that the skirt-dance was obviously modern. I replied that modernity was the essence of dramatic success, and quoted Shakespeare's precedent of the Bohemian sea-coast. As he still held out, I suggested that he should dance the

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tarantella himself. Nobody else could, or would. He then talked of bringing over some Corsican dancing-master who lived in an orange-grove near Ajaccio, and had once, by his superb art rescued Courage's portmanteau, if not his life, from some cut-throat fellow-citizens, who had carried Courage and his portmanteau up into some mountain fastness on pretence of showing him how a celebrated Corsican cheese was made, to teach the art. The time, however, left for the purpose, amounting to three days was clearly insufficient, so Priscilla went on with her skirt-dance.

The Princess Pomponella looked captivating in her vermilion dress—in which she sets off to the moors of Lampadia to warn her lover of the marquis' treacherous plot. (Details of this frock, harmony of its trimmings, ruchings, embroideries and general fittings, with which I am not competent to deal, may be learnt by the curious in the columns of the *Wimperley Examiner* of December 27.) A special reporter was sent by this enterprising journal to do the dresses, and he evidently received some flowing impressions in the earlier part of the evening of the performance, before—but I will not anticipate.

Princess Pomponella I say, to return to the subject of my sentence, was my severest trial. Star actresses are proverbially difficult to deal with, but the Princess beat the record. Not that she was incapable of learning her part—on the contrary she

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had, as the marquis choicely observed, a memory like fly-paper. Nor was it that she always desired to put herself forward, as stage-princesses sometimes do. The trouble lay rather in her resolute self-effacement and her equally resolute desire to efface the marquis and the bandit. She criticised them with justice, but without mercy, which made them uncomfortable. A stage embrace under her auspices became the most frigid thing you can conceive, and the bandit complained bitterly in asides to me.

The marquis, who had more gumption if less encouragement, and was always peculiarly unconscious of snubs, prospered rather more, but he could not be said to bask in her kindness. Even little Meek, who was her stage-father, and for whom—apart from that—any one might have had consideration, was treated to the Princess's disdain. She complained of his hectoring as being perfectly childish, and on the second evening of rehearsals compelled him in the face of the whole crowd to gnash his teeth after her for three minutes, in spite of my remonstrances. This was indeed the occasion of his being nearly suffocated.

Whether all this wrong-headedness on the part of the Princess arose from the fact that Mr. Harold Wilton (who had now arrived at the Manor House) had not been invited to take part in the performance, and as a consequence was not usually present at rehearsals, which were held in the Wimperley Town



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Hall, or was merely an expression of her critical attitude towards the play—which attitude I was at some pains to conceal from the author—I cannot take it upon myself to decide.

Lady Crummerton ignored it. She also ignored Wilton as much as possible. She was alternately overcome by the acting of the marquis and the bandit, particularly during our dress rehearsals. The programmes, printed in scarlet and gold, and stating that on Boxing Day "The Missing Princess" would appear under the patronage of Lady Crummerton, had arrived. The scenery was complete. Everbody said the dresses fitted beautifully.

### IV

Boxing Day broke, as they say in novels, fine and clear. The slight frost of overnight had not turned to snow or sleet as Sir Thomas' glass had prophesied it would, and as Lady Crummerton said slight frosts always did on Boxing Day, but continued to be a slight frost. This weather phenomenon I do not bring in for purposes of descriptive writing, but merely because it had an enlivening effect on those members of the company who were inclined to be nervous. Frost destroys nerves, as Sir Thomas observed at breakfast.

Meek was the only man who did not seem to feel the truth of this proverb. Finding him dependent on whisky and soda, I set George Courage—who had come down for a couple of nights, as

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fierce on behalf of his play as a hen on behalf of her chicks—over him.

"Look after him," I said significantly, "and keep him on milk."

"I will," Courage assured me. "If Meek is going to spoil the Archduke we may as well give up the whole performance."

"Quite true," I said, and went out for a walk with Wilton, to escape the innumerable questions that I foresaw would be put to me otherwise.

I do not know exactly that I need describe Wilton, as he is not in the play. An artist by profession, of the tidy sort. He is an abominably fast walker. When he had got me some miles out of Wimperley, and quite out of breath, he suddenly enquired how the farce was going.

"What?" I asked.

"How is the farce going?"

"George's little romance? The tickets are said to be selling like autumn leaves."

"And it's for a charity?"

"Decidedly."

Wilton hummed and looked away, then began to say something and stopped. He looked rather like a man who wants to confide something. I am a man who hates confidences.

"Nice day," I said.

Wilton paid no attention to the remark.

"You wouldn't have to return the money if—if anything went wrong?" he said.

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"It won't go wrong," I returned cheerfully. "The only accident that I can conceive is the Archduke getting suffocated again by his beard, and that would be encored."

"How they allow you to do it," said Wilton, as inconsequently as before, "I cannot make out."

"Nor can I," I agreed, "but remember that I might have written the play."

We talked of other things the rest of the way, but they had nothing to do with this story. I am not sure that anything I have said so far has had anything to do with it. Want of practice in the art of fiction may account for it, but as there is a story to be written about the affairs of Boxing Night I will proceed.

### V

Conceive then the Town Hall of Wimperley, large and ugly and lighted by gas, a fashionable assembly in the centre of it, and an assembly, equally fashionable in its way, in the gallery at the back. Conceive, also, a raised stage with foot-lights but no curtain, so that there is distinctly visible upon it the interior of the Archduke's castle in Lampadia, with all its properties, plus the stage-carpenter, who explained afterwards that he had left his quart of ale in the antique cupboard and "knowed there wouldn't be no chance for getting a pull at it later." Conceive, moreover, in the

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prompter's box, George Courage, who had already been there half an hour, becoming more and more like a semaphore as he beckoned wildly to the stage-carpenter to retire.

"They'll take you for the marquis," I heard him whispering hoarsely.

"Not me," returned Mr. Jenkinson cheerfully, "I'm a-goin', sir; don't you worrit."

I heard this dialogue as I stood in the wings, preventing the proper marquis, whose stage fright took the form of precipitate haste and a tendency to strong language, from rushing on to the stage before his *vis à vis*, Priscilla, was ready.

"Damn it," said the marquis, as the orchestra—three violins, a flute and a piano—struck up, "where is she? Why doesn't she come?"

"There's no hurry," I said soothingly; "lots of people to take their seats still, and the overture isn't finished yet. No, no" (as he made a rush), "unless you're going to do a curtain-lifter with Jenkinson. Sure you remember your part?"

"Curse it, no," said the marquis, clutching at his wig. "What the—— how does it go, Cradford?"

"'Good morrow, fair maid, is't possible that the Archduke'—there she goes." (The orchestra had come to a stop and Priscilla, quite self-contained, was tripping on to the stage from the opposite side.) "Let her begin dusting first. Now, on you

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go, and if you can't remember anything, sneak up to George."

But loud applause from the hall informed me that the marquis was already on the stage, and, I trusted, leering.

"Seems in a bit of a fuss," I turned to find myself addressed by the bandit, who was standing nonchalantly on one top-booted leg like a stork.

"Wait till your turn comes," I said.

"Oh, I'm all right," said the bandit, "but, I say you'd better come and have a look at Meek; he's delirious or something."

"Where?" I said.

"In the dressing-room."

We hurried along and found the archduke struggling as if with wraiths in front of a looking-glass.

"Look here," I said to him, reproachfully, "you've got to go on in about two minutes."

"It's this—beard," came in muffled tones from Meek; "too much—up, can't get my voice through it. Ugh, ugh."

"Wear it half off, then, like that," I said, giving it a pull. "You'll have to pretend it's part of the period. Come along now, you mustn't sit down. Drink this." I poured out some whisky and emptied it down the place where his mouth ought to have been. The beard seemed to receive most of the refreshment. "Never mind," I said, cheerily, "table manners weren't known during the period. Here, take his arm."

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Between us, the brigand and I got him to the wings just in time and shoved him forward vigorously. A loud cheer greeted his entry. "I believe he's fallen over," said the bandit.

"Never mind," I said, "he was old and gouty, and it's a thoroughly dramatic entrance."

I hurried back to superintend the crowd.

Precisely how the first scene was got through I am unable to say. I was told that the Archduke did fall down, as Heron had surmised, almost into the prompter's box, but, by a happy inspiration that I should never have suspected in him, made no attempt to rise, but, pretending that it was in his part sat there cross-legged throughout, and had the full benefit of George's prompting. George said that he was very husky and gave, by his attitude, an Oriental turn to the romance which was not proper to the period. The marquis, too, had behaved rather as if he were a half back (which must have lent a modern touch). But, assisted by the crowd, Priscilla had made the scene pass off. At any rate, the applause at the end of it was inspiring.

"Now, please remember, ladies and gentlemen," I said, addressing the crowd at large, as the orchestra struck up again, "that there is only an interval of three minutes between the first and second scenes. Duenna, you go on first with the bandit, then the princess, and when the whistle goes, more bandits. Have all the bandits got their wigs?"

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(Those of the crowd who were not also bandits had to lend their wigs, as there were not enough otherwise). "Bandits, one word, kindly attend! Mind that you will have entered the castle by a rope ladder, and don't behave as if you'd only gone up in a lift. Now, duenna."

The duenna dropped me a curtesy and a smile, and moved on gracefully, followed by the bandit chief.

"Two legs, remember!" I called after him.

"And please be bold and defiant, Mr. Heron," added the Princess, who had just turned up. "I'm not a piece of Salviati glass, and" (as the bandit waved his hand airily and disappeared with sloping shoulders) "a bandit ought not to look like a soda-water bottle."

"Never mind, Princess," I said, encouragingly, "you're looking all right."

"Thank you."

I breathed again when she had gone on, for she looked radiant, as if she had thrown her heart into the piece for the first time, and I wondered what Wilton would think of her. Two or three minutes later Heron's followers had trooped on, and the play seemed to be going lustily. I turned my attention to the archduke, who was suffering bitterly at the thought of his unsuccessful debut.

"I don't know how I'm to get through it, Cradford," he said miserably.

"Better have a crutch or a bath chair," said the

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marquis, unkindly. "How's a fellow to act with you?"

I winked at the marquis to leave him alone, and assured Meek he would feel much better when his turn came again.

"All the best actors suffer from stage-fright at first," I informed him.

"Not from epilepsy," grunted the marquis.

"It's the beard," sighed the archduke.

"Cheer up," I said. "If we'd thought of it we could have made a chin beard or whiskers, but as it is, you're doing splendidly. Hullo, Wilton!"

"Just looked in to see how you were going," said Wilton, with a grin. "First scene seemed good enough, and they're clapping again. If you were to tell Courage not to shout so loud we should hear more of what the others have got to say."

"I will," I said.

I lost sight of Wilton after that, being sent for by Lady Crummerton, who wished me to explain to an elderly gentleman—the Mayor of Whimperley—what period the play was written round, as he was interested in archæological history. I said that it was the Post Mycenean period, and left him impressed, but argumentative, because of the Chippendale chairs. Everybody, I gathered, was very pleased with the first act.

It was during the second act as I remembered later, that a boy came up to me and asked if the carriage was to wait, as, though the gentleman had



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told the coachman to, it was a cold night and he was afraid of his horses. As this conveyed nothing to me, and I was, moreover, engaged at the time in urging the archduke by a mixture of cajolery and terrorism to go on again at all costs, I said "Certainly," and also "Certainly not," and left it to Wilton, who had just turned up again and seemed to have nothing particular to do to see about it.

"You might get the horses to drag the archduke on if they want some warm work," I said.

But the Princess, who had just come off the stage, offered to use her influence with Meek, so that the horses were unnecessary.

"I want to speak to you for a moment, afterwards, Miss Windover," said Wilton.

"Let's get Meek on first," I said on her behalf. "Then you can do what you like."

It was nothing to do with me if Wilton was going to speak in a way Lady Crummerton would not approve. The Princess had done well by me, the stage-manager, and she deserved a reward, I thought. Anyhow, I was busy. Among other things, Mr. Jenkinson, who ought to have been changing the interior of the castle into the moor for the third act, had imbibed the whole of his quart and—I judged—at least a gallon besides, so that the author, assisted by three bandits in plain clothes, were compelled to do the shifting with the result that the oak trees grew in an unnatural way, and the antique cupboard got left in one corner, where,

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in the dim light, it looked—no doubt—like a mountain. The sheep in the distance could not be found anywhere, and George, who resented my proposal to substitute the Chippendale chairs—in the distance—was for throwing up the play. However, all was ready at last, and the bandits went on.

What was to happen was this. To the moor, the ancient haunt of the bandits (who are discovered peacefully cutting up venison, brewing cocoa, etc., with songs and dances) comes the bandit chief—dismal but not hopeless—after having announced his love for Pomponella and defied the archduke and the marquis to do their worst. Close upon his heels, unknown to him, follows the archduke, who, put up to the job by the treacherous marquis, has armed the crowd and determined to enfilade the bandits at the setting of the sun. But, closer still than the enemies, the Princess pursues her lover, meaning to warn him of this brutal plot. The Princess is accompanied by her maid, and—contrary to expectations—by the duenna, who has, in spite of her age, turned up trumps and fallen in love with one of the lesser bandits.

Given these conflicting forces, it is easy to perceive the dénouement. There is an awful moment of suspense, followed by a *mélée* (the wigs are equally divided in this scene between the bandits and the crowd, of whom an equal number fall and do not really need their wigs) in which the bandit

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chief kills the marquis in single combat, and the duenna receives the wound intended for her betrothed. The archduke, finding himself beaten, gives his blessing to the Princess and Heron—at least, he does in the original version—but I had arranged during the interval that he should also fall, killed from behind by the janitor (who might be supposed to owe him a grudge for not paying him his wages or calling him “Minion” too often—or what not), and the blessing would consequently be dispensed with.

Man proposes, but, well—this is what happened. I may as well be brief about it. While I smoked a cigarette peacefully behind the scenes, certain, after I had seen every one ready, that nothing further could go wrong, I was astonished by the sudden irruption of Priscilla and the duenna, followed at no great distance by the marquis, the archduke, and the whole of the crowd.

“I say,” I cried reprovingly, “you ought to be in your places.”

“Where’s Miss Windover?” asked Priscilla.

“What?” I said. “Isn’t she on?”

“No,” said several people at once.

I was about to start up in a hurried search when the boy who had come to me before about the carriage came in again with a note for me.

“Sorry to spoil the Romance, but we couldn’t wait.—Wilton.”

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I read this aloud, and suddenly the meaning burst upon me.

"They've eloped," I said.

"Damnation!" said the marquis, and at the same moment the bandit came hurrying up distractedly.

"I say, Cradford, where's Miss Windover? I've been on and off again, and things are in a mess. George has been making impromptus for the brigands, but they don't take 'em. Everybody's wondering what's up. They're beginning to stamp."

A noise was certainly audible from the body of the hall, and it grew louder as I explained to the bandit what had occurred.

"Perhaps," said the duenna sagaciously to me, "you had better go and make a speech. Say she's fainted."

"Perhaps I'd better," I agreed.

I could hear the marquis saying "Damn" as I went forward, but the brigand was standing all in a heap on one leg.

"Ladies and gentlemen," I said, making a bow to the audience—"as stage-manager of the little romance that we have had the pleasure of acting for you to-night, on behalf—I may remind you—of the Society for Propagating" (I slurred the name over, as I had forgotten it, but I thought I had better refer to the charity) "I have been asked to explain to you why it has apparently come to an end in the middle of a scene (cheers). I say apparently, for you will remember that the name of the play is

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'The Missing Princess.' You never know where a playwright is going to take you" (I could hear George grinding his teeth at me from the prompter's box, where he must have been getting stiff), "but our playwright of to-night has shown us the force of the old adage that truth is stranger than fiction, and I am sure we shall all thank him."

I was interrupted at this point by a question from Lady Crummerton.

"Where is Hesketh?" but I signed to her not to press for an answer, and continued——

"In other words, the Princess is, as the programme informs us, missing. Under the circumstances, ladies and gentlemen, it would be as well if you were to consider that the curtain has fallen."

I stepped down amid hurrahs, which were kept up for some time by the gallery, and explained matters to Sir Thomas and Lady Crummerton. I think Sir Thomas summed up the affair when he said that we had better be getting back to the Manor House, as it was certainly going to sleet.

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**T**HE Queen had smiled for a moment to see the young courtier in his disguise. The blue smock, the baggy breeches that he knelt in with so gallant a clumsiness, the *sabots* that had made such a clattering on the polished floor,—these, and the stains on face and hands, made M. Jean de Pellotin something so different from the sumptuous and exquisite gentleman-in-waiting whom she had seen a few hours ago.

“You are transformed,” she said.

“Except from my loyalty,” he replied.

“Ah, sir,”—the Queen smiled upon him, very gracious for all her melancholy—“you are most loyal and most brave. I do not know for what merit of my own I am surrounded by such gallant gentlemen.”

“Madam, it is a most trifling service,” said de Pellotin. Indeed, since he had at that moment knelt to kiss her hand, what concerned him chiefly was the desire to carry himself through this ceremony of farewell without undue awkwardness, which was perhaps a trifling consideration. The hundred thoughts that had oppressed him for the last few hours, ever since he had volunteered to

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carry a message in disguise through the ranks of the revolutionists, the innumerable conflicting anxieties as to what a disguised man should do in various contingencies, had left him for the moment. He was still in the citadel, and his business was to take a decorous farewell of his Queen. "Indeed, Madam," he added, "it is an honour that I should have been selected."

"You are most brave," she repeated.

The Chancellor and the General, who alone were in attendance, had been conversing in low whispers, and now the General broke in: "But you must go, de Pellotin. It is time,—if you are ready?" "If her Majesty is ready?" corrected the Chancellor, formally. The Queen nodded, as the young man rose to his feet. "Pray God you may prosper!" she said.

De Pellotin made a low bow. From outside came the noise of the revolutionists, the roll of drums, shouts, the crack of a musket let off at random, all the confused din of a city in mutinous revelry. But the sounds did not concern him greatly; rather, they chimed in with his present state of exaltation. They were no more alarming to him, as he backed from the throne-room and followed the two old noblemen into the corridor, than are the accompaniments of an orchestra to a singer taking his topnote. The sounds of the rebels were his orchestra. Perhaps that is why a sort of gloom came on him now, as he moved along between the other

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two towards the picture-gallery of the citadel. The corridors were so silent, so depressing, that he lost his illusions immediately, as an actor might whose accompanists are cut off at a critical moment, leaving him unsupported. It was not fear of the risks he was to run that beset him, but doubt, a provoking doubt, that made everything, perils and all, misty. His mind had reverted to all the previous anxieties, which he had put away from him when he had to appear before the Queen, when he had to show himself ready, and even more than ready, to play the hero in advance, as became the courtier, not to fall below his reputation,—which he had put away, in the hope that the moment of action would prevent their return. He had hoped to find himself single-minded at this moment and clear of the mists. And yet, once again, he was only conscious that the business of penetrating the city in disguise had been put upon him, and that the hundred uncertainties it involved dazed him intolerably.

“A man with a head,”—de Pellotin became aware that the Chancellor was talking cheerily—“a man with a head should accomplish it without difficulty. We place you beyond the lines, so that, although the city seethes with malcontents, you are at any rate past the supervision of the more disciplined. True, patrols go round at intervals, but there is no order about it, no certain scrutiny; one has only to keep one's eyes open.”



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"I understand." De Pellotin was pleased to hear that his own voice rang clear in answer. Somehow he had expected it to be unbalanced, too mild or too harsh, for the old man's chatter was annoying in its easy fluency. So old a man might have known, de Pellotin thought, that a silent sympathy would have been more decent.

"You think it will be quite easy?" he asked, with concealed irony.

"Quite," said the Chancellor.

"In my view,"—the General must needs strike in with a different opinion—"a disguised man depends on luck. There is no denying it. The best hypocrite might well fail to preserve his secret, while the poorest, on the contrary, might swagger through. I remember once when I took a dispatch through the lines at Platonne"—

De Pellotin stared curiously at the General. So he was become garrulous; he also, it seemed, had tried the business of disguise. Could it be then that he was ignorant of the horrid anxieties that clung to a man at the start? Apparently it could be. He was telling with a laugh of some absurd misadventure that had nearly brought about his death.

"I repeat, it is luck. At another time I could never have stumbled on such a folly, or again have recovered my footing and got away safe. All luck! I wish you plenty of it, young sir."

"You are very kind. I——" de Pellotin paused.

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He had an insane idea of asking the General to sketch his feelings, his emotions at every inch of that overpast perilous road. But he perceived in time that the General had forgotten them as if they had never been. Perhaps he himself would also be able to forget,—in some time to come.

Presently the Chancellor stopped in front of a panel in the gallery. "These antique passages," he said, "are always the same; but how they keep their secrets! Enter, gentlemen."

The panel had revolved on hinges inwardly at the pressure of some unapparent knob, and a tunnelled passage led downstairs into darkness.

The Chancellor was fidgetting at de Pellotin's slowness. "Quickly, please," he cried, "and you, General. I will light the taper inside; it is wise to keep these secrets."

They stepped in, all three, and the door closed behind them. An earthly smell rose to meet them as they descended, the Chancellor leading. "Quarter of a mile," he kept saying; "and one might die of a rheumatism on the way."

"Egad, you civilians!" said the General, tramping sturdily. "But where the devil does it come out?"

"By the linden coppice, at the left extremity of the park. You have observed it, riding? Well, that is beyond their lines, you understand? The smaller gate on the right leads to a lane abutting on the Rue St. Dominique. The only difficulty

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is to get through the city, which our friend, the General, calls a matter of luck."

"Assuredly."

"Well, it may be; but, in my opinion, a man with a head assists luck."

"You should know, Chancellor," said the General, pacifically.

"Well, well," the other chuckled, well pleased.

De Pellotin heard their chatter with disgust. They seemed to him without feeling, withered up, the veriest stocks. And at what a pace they were hurrying him along! Shame only withheld him from asking them to go more slowly, shame lest he should be mistaken.

He had no wish to withdraw from his mission: his desire to serve the Queen held as strong as ever; but he wanted to collect himself, to arrive at a precise scheme.

Incredible as it might seem, they had already reached the end of the passage.

"Listen," said the Chancellor. "I will half open the door, and you must step quickly out. Not that there are likely to be loiterers hereabouts; but one must keep the secret of the passage. We are not relieved yet; it lies with you. You understand? The disguise must take you to the outskirts of the city. Once in the open country you should be safe: they have no force to patrol it for half a mile; and ten miles away, at Groyal, Colonel Cabot lies. His instructions are, *Come at once*; that

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is all. As it is, he awaits reinforcements, thinking the rebels stronger than they are, and not knowing our weakness."

"Yes, yes," said de Pellotin pettishly. He had heard it all before a hundred times. If he arrived at Groyal, he knew what to say well enough. Good heavens, could not this old dotard see that it was the traversing of the city that was the formidable business?

The Chancellor was holding out his hand. "Farewell then," he said, and turned to open the door.

The fresh upper air came streaming down as de Pellotin was shaking the General's hand. "Now!" said the Chancellor. The General was gripping de Pellotin's hand perfervidly, or was it he who was gripping the General's? Somehow the young man did not want to let it go. Not until the other began to withdraw his fingers did he realize what he was doing, and at that he dropped the General's hand as if the contact stung him. The next moment he had stepped out into the night, and the door was closed behind him. And since that was so, he could not hear the Chancellor remarking to the old General, "A little nervous, our young friend, eh?"

"As he should be," said the General stiffly. "It is what one expects. Disguise changes a man. I remember well how——"

"But you think he will get through?"

The General shrugged his shoulders. "Sir," he

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said, "it is a young man of spirit. If it were a fight, hand to hand, I should not hope to better him. As it is, disguise plays the very devil with the inexperienced. God send him luck!"

It was already long past midnight, and the evening had set in with a warm rainy wind. A moon of autumn, very lustreless, was caught in some trees, and in the open sky was a suppressed glare of stars invisible behind an overdrift of clouds. The gusty air took away de Pellotin's breath as he stood there on the threshold of his adventure. No one was about in that recess of the dank park, no one to challenge, nor even to see him, and there seemed to be a lull in the ceaseless din that had beaten into the citadel all day. The trees, well-nigh leafless as they were, seemed to shut out the furious world. A sudden feeling that in that coppice he could be himself, indisputably individual, neither courtier nor peasant, bound to pretend neither fearlessness nor abashment, gave him the desire to stand there for ever. Why should he be driven on into perilous imposture?

Splash! A drip of rain water from a bough overhead that shivered on his neck reminded him of the issues that depended on his going. Scarcely witting, he ran forward and found himself passing through a little gate into a lane. The tread of someone advancing warned de Pellotin that he had left solitude behind, and must play the part of the peasant he represented. It was time, more than

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time (so near the steps sounded), to adopt a single coherent plan of action if he would not put himself at the mercy of the countless contradictions that vacillation breeds.

As a peasant he was disguised well, he must keep in mind the gestures, the accent, the slouch of a peasant. Under a mask of boorish torpor he must be ready to seize occasion in a lightning of wit, and retain his composure, should a shadow of suspicion be visible, up to the very last. All the while the footsteps were coming up, and the slouching peasant was feeling at his pistols; he was afraid lest he might lose touch of them in the vast folds of his breeches.

"A warm night, Jacques."

"Er,—what?"

"A warm night."

"V—very." De Pellotin stammered out the word, and was already slinking off, leaving the rebel soldier, who had so innocently addressed him, staring. "Now, what ails the cur?" asked the soldier of the empty street. No one replying, he spat on the ground reflectively; then put up his hands and looked through them after de Pellotin. "It might be a spy," he said aloud. "Maybe it would be as well to tell the Captain." He was not suspicious enough to make any haste about the matter, and de Pellotin, looking back in a frantic wish to know if he were still observed, saw the man standing gazing, interested, as it seemed, in

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the peasant who shuffled along so outrageously.

Whether suspected or not, de Pellotin was painfully conscious that he deserved suspicion. Composure! At the first most commonplace greeting he had almost betrayed himself. He, who had determined to be on the alert, had choked for a word; a gentleman of wit had nothing but a stammer wherewith to answer a common rebel. Already the game might have been up, the Queen's secret surrendered. What was he fit for, who had proven himself inebile?

The blackest doubts assailed him again, like a swarm of bees, and he looked about distractedly. The roar of the Rue St. Dominique was ahead of him, but he dared not turn into it. To face a multitude of men with eyes was more than he could bear; there must be some other route, though he could not think of that, or indeed of anything. Moving more like a rabbit than a man, he scuttled into the first silent street that offered itself, stopped, and again looked about distractedly.

It was a winding cobbled street with tall over-leaning houses to keep out the sun, old houses with slant red roofs and overhanging eaves. Here and there rose a tall lean lamp-post, but the street was unlighted except by splashes of invading moonlight that fell on the wet stones and seemed to be driven about, as the leaves were, by every puff of wind.

To de Pellotin the disguise he wore, added to  
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his distrust of its efficacy, was bringing a hideous fancy. Not himself was disguised, but the city, which wore an unwonted and fantastical countenance. Never before, to his recollection, had he seen such monstrous and menacing architecture as overtowered him now. He had come by this way to avoid the eyes of men, and a myriad inanimate eyes searched him. Chimneys, prodigiously crooked and life-like, were on the look-out; sudden windows leered on him from unexpected floors; lamp-posts started up out of the darkness, like sentinels, to challenge him. Twice he shrank back before them into a doorway, but the soft wood that his hands touched felt like human flesh, and he fled from the silent ambuscaders.

Even as he ran and shrank and dodged, he conceived he was learning his part. For it was part of his delusion that he felt compelled to play the peasant everywhere. If the walls were unconscious witnesses, so much the better, but he must practise humility none the less. Humility, humility,—he kept repeating it to himself—he must not forget that humility became him. At such moments when he believed himself still undiscovered he exercised himself in this unwonted capacity, doffing his cap to door-posts, slinking past dumb masonries, as though they were some great ladies whom to touch with his stained blouse would be presumption. The more he disbelieved in the adequacy of his acting, the more intensely he acted; and, because



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intensity of application counts for years of practice, the more deeply he sunk into his feigned humility, until it was no longer feigned but real. In half an hour, maybe, Jean de Pellotin was, to all outward intent and appearance, absolutely mean, one of the servile rabble overcome by the reality of his disguise. No one would have recognised the young courtier in that stooping wretch, if he had but known it. But he slunk on, unknowing, his eyes fixed on the ground in his abjection, and if he looked up, and saw, maybe, the grinning gargoyles carved on the porch of some church, he thought them facetious conspirators grinning at him, and he only dropped his jaw in a deprecatory manner.

In such fashion, with a great thirst growing on him, he passed through a tangle of silent streets, until he came out on a square and, in the middle of it, a little fountain where, back to back, four dragons stood rampant on a circular pedestal. The solemn-visaged beasts attracted him, and he would gladly have gone up and worked the handle he could see and made the water spout through their nostrils. But the steps that led up to the fountain level were splashed already with water, and the wavering moonlight made them look so slippery that de Pellotin (whose nerves were now topsy-turvy) feared to ascend them.

"Hi!"

As he stood there, thirsty and vacillating, a woman hailed him. He saw that two women, one

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old and one young, were on the steps at the opposite side of the fountain, and the old one had hailed him. Immediately he tried to become a part of the shadows, but the old woman was not deceived. "See, my son," she cried, "it's too high. Oh, these villains of rulers to have made the fountain so high that poor folks cannot drink!"

De Pellotin perceived that neither she, who had put down from her curved back a heavy bundle, nor the girl, who carried a child, could reach to the handle. It struck him as immensely pitiful, but he tried to go past nevertheless. "Very sad," he mumbled.

"Come and turn it for us," said the old woman.

"No, no, I couldn't; I swear—upon my word now."

"Name of a swine!" The old woman reeled off a medley of curses. "Do you call yourself a man, and cannot turn a tap for Mother Voglee. What? You will not? But you shall! Come!"

She stood there, skinny-armed, invoking a hundred devils. Her screech and fiery eyes and diminutive stature reminded de Pellotin of nothing but a witch. Suppose she were a witch? Suppose this old hag possessed some supreme malignant spells to hold a man? He could not stir.

"If you come not, I'll curse you, hearken, you an' yourn, your pig and your crop"—she ranted on.

Vaguely the threats terrified him. True, he had neither pig nor crop to fear for, but the curse

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assumed enormous potentialities, seeming to embrace his whole existence. "Stop, stop, I pray," he cried.

"If you be not coming——"

"I'll come." He crept up, treading carefully the moonlit steps. The old woman gabbled violently while he set himself to work the rusty handle. "Water!" she kept crying.

The girl stood silent, holding the child, until the water gushed out of the dragons' mouths, when she drank of it eagerly. The old woman also drank, but, finishing first, nudged de Pellotin in the ribs to draw his attention to the baby that was in the girl's arms. "What o' that?" she asked, ogling him.

"A f-fine child," he stammered in reply.

"A fine child!" she cackled with laughter. "Here's a mince-mouth for ye, Amélie. A fine child, your little bastard! 'Tis a bastard, my son." She altered her tone. "Didn't ye know it, mince-mouth?" She regarded him closer. "Why, you be no peasant-boy; you be some broken valet, some gentleman's man, you and your mincing. Strike me dead, likely you're the gentleman himself." She stretched up a skinny hand and seized de Pellotin's collar.

"It's a lie," he said, in terror.

"May be, but you're a gentleman. 'Twas a gentleman she said. "Hey, Amélie, was this mincing crittur the man?"

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"I swear I never saw—" began de Pellotin.

"'Twas not he, 'twas a real gentleman," put in the girl in a sing-song voice.

The old witch released his collar and gave him a push. "Get away, you hulking beast!" she screamed, flinging curses after him as he hurried away.

The young man was running, as if for his life. No clear thought was in his head, except that the falsity of his position was too much for him at last, and that somehow he must escape; so he ran and the warm air suffocated him. His legs trembled, the sweat ran from his brow; he shut his eyes in fear; the sound of his own footsteps threatened him like pursuers; he dodged the shadows. Then something struck him and he struck back madly, clutched at the enemy and began wrestling furiously.

There is this difference between an intense and an habitual frame of mind, that the former cannot last. Never in his life before had de Pellotin played the abject, and when he opened his eyes, neither throwing nor overthrown, and found that he had been struggling with the protruding post of some balcony, his mood of humiliation vanished, and he burst into laughter.

"This is acting that would bring down the house," he said aloud ruefully. "I must have lost my head. The devil take a disguise in which I have deceived myself and no one else!" It was

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clear enough, he thought, that he could not act. Even that old woman had seen through him. Twice, with every advantage on his side, he had bred suspicion in the unsuspecting. Positively he had forced detection upon these casual innocent wayfarers. Why? Because he could not rid himself of his self-consciousness. He saw it now. He put it that he was not born to be an impostor; but he recognised that, even if he were so born, an impostor, to be successful, requires experience. Disguise places one in a new world of new customs and manners. At every step some new necessity arose, for which no previous reasoning could prepare him. To slouch and cringe was merely the alphabet of imposition. Well, he would do no more imposing; he would plunge boldly forward, swagger, and trust to luck. The thought recalled the General's saying, "All luck."

The first step he took in his revived confidence was to return to the fountain. No one was there, and he drank to luck in the cooling draughts. "And now for the Rue Dominique," he said to himself. The roar of it appealed to him now, and he had no desire to avoid his enemies. He made for it as directly as possible, and came out upon it quickly.

The whole wide street was in commotion. Crowds of citizens poured up and down it, doing what took their fancy without regard one for another. Bonfires had been lighted at intervals in the open road; unhorsed carts stood, blocking the pavements, some

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upright, others overturned. There were half-finished barricades that barred nobody, and hindered everyone. As de Pellotin came out, a soldier, evidently drunk, with a goose under his arm and a drawn sword in his hand, was hacking his way along with good-humoured intolerance, followed by a trail of mocking boys. Another led solemnly an improvised file of shrieking girls, the rank being broken every now and then for the sake of a kiss. Here was a fight surging round a plucked fowl; there, a sudden break and lifting of skirts, as some child threw a squib into a circle of women. De Pellotin, as he walked along grimly amused, was unexpectedly embraced by a thin weedy old man, decently gowned as a professor with a college-cap at the back of his head, who stumbled upon him and clung. The old scholar had a silver tankard, half-full of wine, in one hand, and he was droning out some long-forgotten song of his student days.

"Hold up, sir," said de Pellotin, amused.

"I will hold up and I will hold forth," said the Professor; "and all in this lecture room shall join the chorus.

'Twas in the jady month of June  
That Kalba donned her scarlet shoon:  
And just an hour past dusk, I swear,  
She reached the mill, for I was there.'

I was there, there," repeated the old man. "So the song says, but most untruly; for to tell the truth,

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sir, nothing of the kind has occurred in the twenty years of my professorship."

"I can well believe it," said de Pellotin, who conceived his respectable and reeling companion to be as good company and as safe as anyone he was likely to come across in the Rue St. Dominique. "To be a professor is to sit high and cold, to be exemplar at a desk, a model in a cap and gown," he continued.

"But is it life, sir?" demanded the Professor. "Damme, sir, do you call it life?" He thumped de Pellotin on the chest gravely, and maundered on. "Plain living,—no wine to-day, Professor; remember that you have to lecture for three hours this afternoon. You have had sufficient of the stuffed carp, Professor; consider how it always affects your elocution."

"Plain living, certainly," agreed de Pellotin.

"But high thinking," said the Professor. "Moral philosophy, seven o'clock; pure mathematics, nine o'clock; logic, ten o'clock. *Barbara celarent*—prove everything, or write it out three times. How many twos make four? Why? What would happen if the same number made five? Is it life, I put it to you?" And without waiting for an answer, he recommenced his drone:—

"My shoes were white as hers were red;

'Good e'en to you, fair Miss,' I said:

'What's this,' she cried, 'whose shoes are white?

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"Tis sure a ghost! Sir Ghost, good night!"  
She turned upon a flying heel,  
and faster than a water-wheel—

Water-wheel—water-wheel." The Professor lost the thread of his song. "'Tis what I feel like myself," he continued thoughtfully. "A water-wheel—very true; turning round and round,—you comprehend me?—now heads down, now tails up. I believe it is life."

"I shouldn't be surprised," said de Pellotin. "I felt not unlike that half an hour ago." He was very content to have the old man clinging to his arm, lurching along, for together they seemed to make a familiar piece of the strange crowd. A peasant and a professor arm-in-arm were, after all, no more remarkable than half the pairs that passed them. Also they were covering the street at no mean pace, considering the traffic. At present, for instance, there was a great block ahead caused by a company of soldiers, who had turned out suddenly from a by-road four deep.

"The patrol!" cried the Professor. "A noble sight! Quick march! Forward! Left wheel!"

"Suppose we change hats?" said de Pellotin, dragged along in spite of himself to where the soldiers stood, marking time. Some words of their leader, addressed to the crowd in a stentorian voice, had caught his ear. "Citizens, it is supposed that a spy, dressed as a peasant, is trying to escape through the lines. Has any man seen him?"



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The Professor, with de Pellotin's cap pressed on his lank hair, lurched forward vigorously, and when the soldier repeated his question, shouted out: "I have him, Captain, in the hollow of my hand. Forward!"

"What do you mean?" whispered de Pellotin, who had started involuntarily.

The Professor winked solemnly. "Nothing," he said. "It is a game, as you shall see. Always assist a soldier,—that is life. Ha, forward!"

Despite his relief, de Pellotin could have wished his maudlin companion at the bottom of the sea, for the soldier came shouldering through the crowd towards them. "What is this?" he demanded. "Have you seen such a man?"

"Why truly," began the Professor, "if two and two make five, of which there can be little doubt, to-night in the mind of any man acquainted with metaphysics. I should have no hesitation——"

"The devil!" said the soldier. "Is he raving? Has he seen anyone?"

"Truth, Captain," said the Professor, "is a matter upon which philosophers—philosophers——"

Seeing the Professor at a loss, and the soldier rapidly becoming intolerant, de Pellotin struck in: "True enough, Captain," he said; "my friend saw just such a man as you describe passing three minutes ago, fast."

"Faster than a water-wheel," added the Professor.

"In which direction?"

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"Towards the open country."

"Lead on then," said the soldier briefly. "Way there!"

The surging crowd raised a cry of "Spy, follow him!" and de Pellotin found himself with his staggering friend drifting down the Rue St. Dominique alongside the soldiers. The Professor indeed got on with much difficulty, but he had taken to the idea of pursuit, and shouldered his tankard as though it were a sword. "A rascal, I warrant you, Sir Captain," he kept saying.

"How dressed?"

"Red shoes."

"Red shoes?"

"'Twas in the jady month of June," asseverated the Professor. The precise import of his words was lost in the shouting and clatter of heels on the pavement, and de Pellotin did his best to reassure the chafing Captain. "Without doubt the Professor has seen him. A little wine has gone to his head since; but he vows he has seen him. Indeed this is the direction."

"Forward there!" cried the Captain.

The crowd was thinning off, and the interest of the more sober portion becoming extinguished, as the march proceeded. The more riotous were damped at the sight of the untenanted street, dark enough after the glare of the bonfires and torches in the crowded end, and dismally wet with untrodden puddles of the rain and fallen leaves uncleared by the feet of passengers. Only a few

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stragglers followed now, and by the time the last house was passed and the road ran on through a dark and solitary country these few also had fallen away. Only the soldiers remained, and de Pellotin with the Professor.

The Captain called a halt, and drew de Pellotin aside. "See here," he said confidentially, "you seem a capable man and this spy must not escape. I am told that already Colonel Cabot lies at Groyal, which, as you know, is at no distance. The devil will be in it if this spy informs him of our condition."

"How so?" asked de Pellotin.

"The fellow will march on us straight; he will be here at dawn."

"And then?"

The Captain spread out his hands, as if to signify the deluge might then be expected. "What would you recommend?" he asked impatiently.

De Pellotin hesitated, and looked about him. Flat lands lay ahead on either side of the road, fields sodden with autumn, and, here and there, a covert of black dripping trees. "Scatter, and search every piece," he suggested at last. "Let some go ahead; the fellow cannot have got so very far."

"That is what I think," said the Captain, giving orders accordingly. "We must leave the old man; you and I will lead." It was no part of de Pellotin's plan to accompany the Captain, but choice was not allowed. "I am with you," he said submissively.

## A NIGHT'S ADVENTURE

"Forward!"

They left the Professor in a maze, lecturing to the empty air with his tankard for pointer and night for his black-board. The wind, that had blown in such fearsome gusts before, was fallen, and the disguised man, stepping side by side with his pursuer, felt in a very whirl of glee. That his so facile imposture should be successful to the extent of inducing a worthy captain of rebels to employ Jean de Pellotin, in disguise, to capture a further more phantasmal Jean de Pellotin, the creation of a fuddled professor's brain, struck him as the essence of humour. And since the soldiers were scattered at considerable intervals, not easily to be collected, he could not refrain from venting his amusement on the Captain. At the time they had just entered one of the coppices, and the moon, that at last had shaken off the clouds, struck full upon them.

"This fellow we are after must be quaking," he said. "It cannot be any joke to slip about in disguise like that."

"Why should the rogue mind?" asked the Captain.

"Try it," said de Pellotin; "only try it, my friend. The self-consciousness, the difficulty of acting up to the state you have assumed—maddening, I assure you."

"You have tried it then?" said the Captain innocently.

"Truly I have, and not so very long ago. Phew!

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to act one must be at a certain temperature, and the weather at another, I assure you, Captain, if one is disguised as a peasant. These breeches,—picture escaping in them." He had his hands in his pockets, and shook the folds out before the puzzled soldier's eyes. "And the mortar-board,—I have had enough of that."

He took off the Professor's head-gear and flung it into the forks of a tree.

Something in the action struck suspicion into the other's mind. "Say! who are you?" he cried suddenly.

"Why," said de Pellotin laughing, "if the truth must be told, and your men are far enough away to make imposition unnecessary between comrades, I am, by name, Jean de Pellotin by rank gentleman-in-waiting to the Queen."

"The spy!"

"At your service, when Colonel Cabot marches on the city at dawn; but at present——"

In a fury the Captain rushed upon de Pellotin with drawn sword; but the young man's head was clear and his hand steady. A pistol cracked in the covert, and the scattered soldiers who started at the sound saw issuing from the trees a solitary figure.

It was M. Jean de Pellotin making in hot haste for Groyal, no longer in disguise.

## THE MAZE

### I

**G**RIBOT, son of the gardener, flew his kite that day in the garden of Chateauvert. Up and up, higher than the trees, almost into the white curls of the clouds, went Mariannette, which was the name of the kite, and at first in the fair wind Gribot had little ado to keep her flying.

The child was sturdy for his age, ox-eyed and very solemn. Since he had been told to go out and fly Mariannette, he obeyed soberly, and behaved as though it were part of his day's work. Very possibly—so he thought—M. le Citoyen, who was at present conversing with his father, watched from the window of the cottage. And because in that event, Mariannette would be on trial, she must not fail of her best. Indeed, she was flying nobly, and the only trouble was that it was already past the hour of Gribot's midday breakfast, and he had in consequence a somewhat empty feeling for a director of kites.

Ordinarily, he would never have ventured to play so deep within the precincts of the Chateau, these not having been laid out for a gardener's son. But of late, as Gribot knew, many things were changed.

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His father, for example, worked less in the garden. Partly that was because M. le Marquis kept always in the house, being ill and reading, so that there was no one to speak severely if the weeds grew, and Gribot's father was of the opinion that the weeds would choke the flowers some day, and that this would be an excellent thing for France. Partly, it was because he went out at all hours, particularly at night, to meet comrades and to listen to the stirring words of M. le Citoyen.

Citoyen Ferrand was this gentleman's name, for there were no Messieurs now. But Gribot, who could not always remember that there were no Messieurs any longer, generally called him M. le Citoyen.

In some way Gribot knew that M. le Citoyen was responsible for the changes that had come about in the village. It was since his arrival that the women no longer came forward to courtesy when Mme. la Marquise drove through. They did not come out at all from their cottages, they were so busy murmuring one to another. They murmured so loud that the horses' hoofs were without sound, it seemed. Only when the carriage had passed by, they would somehow hear it and run out and cry after it bitterly and shake their fists. The men in the village, too, like Gribot's father, though they had even less to eat, worked little, but went out readily to listen to the words of M. le Citoyen.

That was because he was a Friend of the People. He had not been a friend for any great time, for

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he had only arrived a week or two before, and even so did not live in the village, but came over from Vernant in the evening in a wagon. He looked very fine when he came from under the hay. Gribot did not understand why he made friends so fast or with such poor people instead of going up to Chateaufvert. But for his great affability he might have been a Marquis himself instead of a hater of them. He also hated children, Gribot fancied, for he always sent Gribot away when he came to the cottage. To-day he had been more impatient than usual to dismiss Gribot.

"Little pitchers have long ears," he said, as he entered, very flustered. "Let the little pitcher fly his kite."

Gribot's father, who had been busy grinding a knife since early morning, looked up grimly.

"Is there work then to be done to-day, Citoyen?"

"To-day. Not later than dusk. The message has been sent from Paris. They recommend"—he paused—"but let the child go out first. The affairs of the people are not to be communicated to everyone, Citoyen."

"Be off, Gribot," said his father, well pleased at being called Citoyen.

Gribot had got out Mariannette, therefore, with his usual gravity, though the wind was not altogether favourable, he thought. M. le Citoyen laughed at that.

"An ill-wind for kites and aristocrats," he said. "Is it not so?"



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Gribot did not understand, but his father, who was still grinding, nodded.

"If permitted to go into the garden," Gribot said, "Mariannette would fly better."

"Go, long-eared pitcher, go where you will," said M. le Citoyen, impatient. "To-day the garden is free to the people."

Then Gribot went. He was of an age to take things literally, and at first he was a little concerned about his ears, and felt them to see if they had really grown long. They seemed much as usual, and Gribot soon forgot about them in the exertion of flying Mariannette. She was old as kites go—Mariannette. Some fine lady, maybe Mme. la Marquise herself, robed as a shepherdess, with rosettes and paint and crook complete, had flown Mariannette first in the gardens of Versailles. Heaven knows what follies Mariannette from the high air had not looked down upon! She was an old, tattered kite when she came into Gribot's possession. But well-beloved.

And in the fair wind, as has been said, she flew nobly. The sun was hot, but Gribot being on an adventure scarcely heeded that, and followed Mariannette along the drives of the park perseveringly, noticing many things of great interest, such as a laurel thicket that promised hedgehogs in its dark green intricacies, and a hollow-sided poplar smelling of the great pink caterpillars that turn some day to beautiful and sombre moths, and here

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and there a little basin or pool, mossy in the shadow of little birches. In one such pool as Gribot ran past, guiding Mariannette with care, he caught the glimpse of a water snake. These alluring sights prevented him from wearying for a long time. Then the wind fell a good deal, quite suddenly, and Gribot began to realise how hot and empty he was. Even while he was thinking of returning, certain that M. le Citoyen would be gone by now, Mariannette, sensitive after so many gyrations and so long a spell of the upper air, conscious, maybe, of the wind's fall and of Gribot's weariness, behaved abominably. So abominably, that after taking the breeze in quite a wrong fashion and making dives and fitful plunges for some moments, regardless of Gribot's directions, she flew finally with a rush into the upper branches of an oak tree. There she stuck.

She hung most foolishly, her tail wagging to and fro among the leaves like a tongue put out at Gribot. Do what he liked with his end of the string, he could not induce her to stir. This way and that he pulled. That way and this Mariannette wagged her tail. Nothing came to earth but some leaves. It was enough to incense anyone, even if he were not hungry, and Gribot began to scold his kite in no measured language. He called her pig and fool, and finally aristocrat. Mariannette only wagged her tail at him. In his vexation Gribot tugged at the string as hard as he was able. But

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neither kites nor aristocrats are easily to be brought down by tugging. In this case the string broke, and there was Gribot on the ground and Mariannette in the tree, unfettered but immobile. Gribot picked himself up and gazed at the treacherous string. What was to be done? After due reflection, it came to him that nothing was to be done but ascend the tree.

It was not so easy. Oaks do not branch from the ground. But the afternoon was before Gribot, and he had perseverance. Clumsily as a young bear he lumbered up the tree, making great stains on his blouse before he had inserted himself into the first fork. Matters went more easily then, so that having a care for rotten branches and with many gasps and pants and beatings down of impeding leaves, Gribot at length attained to the bough from which Mariannette had suspended herself. It was a good thick bough, at once lofty and protrudent. A straddle of it, Gribot could contemplate the universe. It was more to Gribot than the universe—this panorama of Chateauvert—it was wonderland; and in his contemplation of it he forgot even his hunger. He forgot to loosen Mariannette, and sat there gazing and gazing at the house, the drives, the woods, the rose gardens and the lily gardens, and, most especially, at the Maze. Bits of them all he had seen before, of course. But he had never seen them all together as a bird sees them. They looked to him as a map might look if it contained not only a surface—straight lines of roads, zigzags

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of rivers, and crosses of woods, set together like a nursery puzzle—but also colour and noise and redolence: as though the roads ran all chalk and rut to the horizon, as though the rivers were a-glitter and alive, as though the woods smelled of summer and rustled with leaves, flapped with pigeons on the wing. The flower gardens, with their straight pale lilies and bewildering roses, were like a lady's printed frock, except that the bees were buzzing there so loudly. But the Maze was the most wonderful of all—a very whorl of green, webbed and winding and criss-crossed with alleys at all angles, that changed to circles and spirals that corkscrewed out and in till they all come to one place—a dot, an eye of greensward, where on a little pedestal stood a grinning marble god, as if drawing all things to him with a leer.

Gribot sat on, well pleased with his watch-tower. Gradually the peace of the afternoon sank into him, and he began to feel drowsy. But it would not be well to go to sleep sitting astride an oak-tree bough as though it were a horse, Gribot thought, and he was about to clamber back to a more secure position, when, most alarmingly, someone came walking under the tree.

“Name of a dog,” said Gribot to himself, and instinctively settled down where he was and peered through the leaves. He could see then that it was M. le Citoyen who had come there, but for what purpose Gribot could not think.

He was walking to and fro with restless strides,

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occasionally cursing gently to himself. Now he would stop directly under the tree, so that Gribot could have dropped a twig on to his hat; then he would walk up the avenue, hesitate as if doubtful whether to go further or no, and return again more restless than before. He was waiting, then, for someone. For whom? Somehow Gribot knew that it was not for him, and that M. le Citoyen would not be pleased to see him there. Rather he expected someone who would come down the avenue—that is to say, from the house. Gribot looked in that direction circumspectly. He could see the house very plainly, and presently, sure enough, someone came from one of the side exits. The person did not cross to the front of the house so as to enter the avenue, but came over the lawn, neither fast nor slow, but unconcernedly as if for a stroll.

As she drew nearer, Gribot saw that it was Henriette, maid to Mme. la Marquise. To Gribot she seemed always a very important person, and she carried her head well back as if she thought so herself. That was how Gribot noticed the red marks on her cheeks. M. le Citoyen, who had not the advantage of Gribot's position, did not even perceive that it was Henriette. On the contrary, when he caught the sound of her steps he went forward eagerly, and cried:

“Adele!”

“It is only Henriette, Monsieur,” she said, demurely. She wore a little grimace as if to say that Henriette was, after all, somebody, and made

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eyes at M. le Citoyen. But he was disappointed, and did not disguise it.

"But Madame—where is she?"

"Madame is delayed. She sends this."

Henriette handed a little note—this with a toss of the head. He caught at it, and read it through hurriedly. Then he stood biting his lips. Henriette smiled disagreeably.

"Madame is not in such haste as Monsieur," she said, and since he did not appear to hear her or to notice the impertinence, she was about to add to it when he broke in:

"Take this message to your mistress. She must come immediately. You understand—immediately! Say to her that there is no time to lose, that I wait here for her, and that if she does not come before dusk"—

Henriette pricked up her ears.

"Before dusk, Monsieur," she repeated, "or else"—?

But the citizen had collected himself.

"That is all," he said, coldly. "Madame will understand. Let her have the message."

The girl spoke up sullenly then:

"But Monsieur does not understand. Madame does not care to be hurried. Other people must hurry—yes." She laughed in an angry fashion, and put her hand to her cheek where it was red. "Oh, yes, if Madame's hair takes time to coiffe, then—then—see, Monsieur!"

But he was not attending to her.

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"She has beautiful hair," he said, absently.

"Very beautiful! And beautiful hands. Monsieur has observed? So small, are they not? But hard!" She raised her voice in a fury, seeing him so unconcerned. "I do not like to be struck, Monsieur le Comte—or, should one say, Monsieur the Revolutionary Agent?"

He turned to her sharply at that.

"What is all this?" he demanded.

"Struck, I repeat, Citoyen, for not being quick, quick, quick as lightning!" She laughed shrilly. But it seemed she had overshot the mark.

"Doubtless you were clumsy," he said, with hauteur. "And now you forget yourself. Go, take the message to Madame quickly, or I do not know but that you will be struck again."

Gribot had never heard M. le Citoyen use this voice, which, however, had its effect. Henriette said quite meekly that she would go. Gribot could not see her face well.

"There, then, that is for you," returned the Citizen.

That was money from his purse, and she went over the green lawn again. Only Gribot, from his high perch, saw how she turned midway and clenched her fist like a woman of the village and shook it towards M. le Citoyen. Gribot ducked his head for fear he should be seen and come in for a share of the malediction. Obviously Mdle. Henriette was not in a good humour.

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Nor, indeed, was M. le Citoyen, for again he had begun striding up and down and swearing to himself softly. Gribot supposed that that was because Mme. la Marquise did not come. It was a great trouble. For how in the name of a fish was Gribot to get away? The noise of his descending would certainly catch the ears of Monsieur and then—?

Descent was not to be contemplated. Gribot settled that quite decidedly. Therefore he must remain. But he felt sleepy and feared to fall. In the end he waited till the Citizen had turned to walk his length up the avenue, and then with infinite caution he crept back to the main trunk of the tree where the forked boughs gave him a back.

In a little time Gribot was asleep.

## II

Because of this, it came about that he did not witness the arrival of Mme. la Marquise, and the Citizen had his hour unspied upon, which was perhaps more than his deserts. Perhaps—for in times like these the Goddess Liberty passes lightly over many sins because they are done in her honour and for the sake of her success. She pardons violence and cruelty, battle and murder, and sudden death. Men may take up the sword then and not perish by it; they may speak lies and establish the truth. But cowardice and the heart of a traitor none of the gods approve.



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She came, beautiful enough, it seemed to the young man, to make even treachery appear a little thing. He had known and loved her in Paris before that old man, her husband, weary of the follies and extravagancies of the court, withdrew to his country seat to retrench and to reflect upon the strange portents that threatened France. Weary occupations those for a young and lovely woman to share. The ennui of such a husband! The horror of such a life in the remote country! Letter after letter had kept the Comte informed of his tragic Marquise. He had replied with sympathy. Paris, he said, seethed with rebellion. Perhaps it was well to be out of it. But great changes were imminent. They would meet at no long date. He did not tell her that he had thrown in his lot with the new party, or that the idea behind his policy was that he should find some way—as he had found one—to free her at one stroke from the bonds of marriage and death. The aristocrats must fall—but he and she would rise from their ashes.

He had only told her this when he came at last—the appointed Revolutionary agent for those parts—his plan in train, her approval the one thing lacking. She shrugged, laughed, and gave it. She could read the signs of the times, and she loved power, which was what this Citoyen promised her. Already they had met twice by stealth. (Gribois was wrong in supposing that M. le Citoyen had not gone up to the Chateau. He had, but secretly.

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Collusion between Mme. la Marquise and the Jacobin agent was best kept secret.) On the second occasion she had agreed that when the signal was given from Paris, she would fly with him, leaving her husband to his fate. He had waited a week for the signal, and now it had come to him.

Now she, too, had come to him. He doted on her face, her form, her perfect languid beauty. Her very languor was fire to him.

"Adele!"

"Behold me," she said, pouting. "What have I not done for you? The haste, the breathlessness, the running to and fro! Henriette impossible in her slowness! And the necessity of it all I cannot conceive."

He bowed over her extended hand.

"But you will forgive me? The danger is so great. I have a carriage in waiting at the west gate of the park."

She sank on to a log near by with all the grace in the world.

"But it must wait, then," she said. "My jewels are not yet packed."

"To wait is dangerous."

"It is always danger, danger with you, Arnaud," she said, smiling indulgently. "What is it—this danger?"

"The peasants," he said. "They cannot be held longer. For days and days I have been urging them on, and the message from Paris came this

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morning. They know it. At dusk the Chateau will be attacked."

She looked at him unmoved, but curious.

"And M. le Marquis, my husband?" she inquired.

"Will die," said the Citizen, grimly.

But gallantly, I am sure," she said. "Sword in hand. He is a fine swordsman, my husband." She laughed.

"It cannot be helped," he said, frowning. He did not like the cruelty in her voice. For his own part, the idea of his treachery haunted him. Perhaps she noticed this.

"Ah, let us not think of him," she said, passionately. "He has spoilt my life—this old man, with his weak heart. Have you a weak heart, Arnaud?"

"Only a weak head," he said. "Otherwise I should persuade you not to linger. I assure you, Adele, my comrades—our free and equal citizens—will be hounds on a scent to-night."

She laughed outright at his perturbation.

"If they should find me?" she said, and laughed again at his horror. "Ah, but they will not. I will go with you before they come. But, first, Henriette must bring me my jewels. A few moments of my solitary company is not displeasing to Monsieur?"

"Adele! Have I not desired it these many days?"

He was on his knees now, and she was certain of her way.

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"Henriette is too slow," she said, "but we have still an hour before your danger comes. And it is impossible that she should be so long. Tell me, Arnaud, have I grown old of late?"

So she cajoled him, and he told her all she desired, praising her eyes and her lips and every part of her. He forgot the need of haste, and Madame was not easily tired of his praising. Presently they walked in the lily garden, which is near the Maze. And there again she seated herself, waiting for Henriette. And it was in the lily garden near to the Maze that M. le Marquis found them.

That was later, when the sun had grown very wide, and was descending visibly to the west. Gribot still slept in the fork of the tree, so that he did not hear the steps of the Marquis, nor see the old man in his black cloak, as he strode so steadily down the avenue. One would not have taken him for so old as Madame had said, despite his grey hair. He was straight as a tree, and his mouth imperturbable. In his right hand he carried a naked sword. He stopped a moment under the oak tree, until he heard the sound of Madame's laughter. Then he walked on, not waiting to listen, into the lily garden. There was no visible change in his face when he found those he was looking for. But they expected Henriette, not this old man, and Madame's colour left her. Then she burst into a sudden quavering laughter.

"It is my husband," she said. "Mon Dieu, it is my husband!"

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The Citizen's hand had gone to the hilt at his side, and he did not look towards her, but kept his eyes on his enemy.

"How does he know?" he asked of the woman.

"Henriette has betrayed us." She crept a little closer as she spoke, and put a hand on the Citizen's arm. "Arnaud, you must kill him," she whispered.

"Yes, yes." The young man had half drawn his sword, without relaxing his stare. Just then the Marquis trod on a twig, and at the scuffle of his foot it seemed to the other that he was running at him.

"Save yourself!" he cried out. "Fly, Adele!"

He had dropped his eyes, and was looking about him.

Immediately behind him was the entrance to the Maze. He half turned.

"You will kill him?" she entreated.

He heard, and answered at random.

"Yes—no—save yourself, Adele, it is too late!"

He turned wholly as he spoke, and from his nerveless hand the sword, half-drawn, slipped back and slid to the bottom of the sheath. He was running now towards the Maze. Madame cried out some word that he did not seem to catch, loudly, then stood still, with tightened lips, at one side of the gravelled path. Past her, without speaking, her husband came. He also had begun to run.

It may have been that he had slept sufficiently, or that the loud cry that Madame la Marquise gave disturbed his sleep; but, without doubt, Gribot,

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in the fork of the oak tree, opened his eyes. Someone had cried out "Lâche!" At that moment he saw someone run into the Maze very swiftly, round the first circle, and into the second. It was M. le Citoyen who did this, and then stood still, sniggering. Almost immediately after Gribot perceived M. le Marquis, holding a sword before him, follow into the Maze.

It was very curious, and Gribot thought it must be a game. He had no idea that M. le Marquis could run. He had never seen him run before. Even now he did not run very fast, but evenly. If it were a game—to see which should first get to the middle, where the statue stood—surely M. le Citoyen would win. Unless, indeed, he did not understand the windings, which was likely. Gribot felt tempted to shout directions to him. He could see the whole labyrinth so plainly spread out. But he remembered in time that he was up one of the trees of the garden, a forbidden place, and that if M. le Marquis heard of it he might be whipped.

Still, his excitement was too great to allow him to remain quiet, and he crept out again along the bough, at the end of which Mariannette hung. Thence he could see still better, and thence it was that he caught sight of Madame. She stood, a little bent forward, one hand at her ear, as if she were listening. Behind her some tall Madonna lilies grew, and it seemed to Gribot that she was as pale as they were. Why? What was in the game to make Madame so white? Perhaps she

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was vexed that she could not see it as Gribot could, owing to the thick, smooth hedges that hid those within from her view.

M. le Marquis ran round the first circle. At that, seeming to hear the steps, M. le Citoyen started and looked about him. His merriment had deserted him—at least, he did not snigger any more. He was undecided too, clearly, for he took a step first one way and then another. In truth, he had just come to the knowledge of his blunder. He did not understand the Maze. He had run in, thinking that, by taking a turn or two, he could mystify his enemy, and then elude him by going back and out. Now he was realising that he himself was mystified, having forgotten by what way he had come in. Had he turned twice or thrice? Was it round and round that he had gone, or cross-wise? The well-clipped yews, alike in depth and thickness, gave him no hint. But he could hear the hard breathing and the tread of his pursuer, and he ran on, twisting and turning, concerned only to put a distance between himself and that enemy. His self-reliance had forsaken him.

M. le Marquis, as Gribot could see, pursued a different plan. He kept stopping and listening, and took the turn likely to bring him in the wake of the other—which hardly seemed likely to bring him first to the middle. Occasionally he would put his hand to his side as he ran, and once he stumbled, and stood as if dead beat, before he resumed his loping gait. The sword that he held before him

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in his right caught the sinking rays of the sun over the tops of the hedges, so that Gribot could follow his course by the points of light that bobbed before him. How differently the two ran! It was hard for Gribot to keep an eye on both of them at the same time, and as for Madame, who was not in the game, she was no longer visible when Gribot looked for her. In any event, she was not so interesting to watch as M. le Citoyen. In and out he went, now ahead of the Marquis, now behind, now chased, now chasing, and then left or right, he was off at an angle, this way and that, never resting. He no longer noticed or tried to count the turns. The Maze had cast its spell on him. Its intricacies seemed to multiply a thousandfold as he ran. It seemed alive, spinning a million new webs to entangle him. Each wynd became a new one, untraversed hitherto, one that would surely set him on the right way, if only it would not become yet another and mock him.

He ran without cessation. . . . Gribot shifted his gaze towards M. le Marquis. He, in his pursuit, had approached the centre now. But his hand was ever at his side, as though it hurt him. He seemed to run mechanically, and to stumble at intervals. Now he was in the innermost ring, reeling most strangely. He was leaning against the stone god; he had lain down at its feet.

It occurred to Gribot that he must be very tired.

Not so the other. Gribot could not understand why, if the race were, as he had assumed, to the



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statue (in which case M. le Marquis had won), this other should continue running. Marvellously indefatigable he was, for the sun, at a man's level, now was red-hot. M. le Marquis was tired out by it. Gribot himself felt a little breathless, there on the cool bough where he was sheltered—but the Citizen ran on, and he was crying out sharp, jerky cries, and then long-drawn ones, like a whinnying horse, and at the corners he would throw up his hands and dodge and shrill warningly, as Gribot's father used to do in turning from a lane on to the high road on a dark night, for fear of colliding with someone driving. But why did this gentleman do it? It was not dark, but still daylight, and there was no one in any case to collide with, seeing that M. le Marquis lay resting at the foot of the statue. M. le Citoyen must be a fool or some kind of an acrobat maybe, such as Gribot had once seen at a fairing, full of quaint gestures and contortions. He could not help clapping his hands in applause. The man ran harder than ever. The reason for this was that the Citizen's wits had deserted him, as well as his self-reliance. He had become an imbecile, an involuntary acrobat. Fear in a thousand shapes ran at his heels, and that constant circling in the sun had made him worse than giddy. He had no longer any idea where he was, or why he was there. He did not remember what had gone before, or who was coming after. Only he felt that he must run and run—and not meet someone. That is why he cried out at the

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corners. At the corners—something whispered to him—there was danger. He must keep his eyes open and speed past them. And his eyes were very wide, wider than their wont. A little mist was over them as over a hunted hare's. He was drenched with the sweat of his running. Gribot imagined foam upon his lips.

Something of pity—self-pity—a restless, uncomfortable feeling, began to creep like a fog into Gribot's head. The doubt that precedes fright got hold of him, and the pleasure of the game began to disappear. Perhaps it was no game. Already it was twilight, and from the chateau, far away over the lawn, there came a roar of voices, like many bees. What they signified Gribot did not know. But the short, snapping cries of the runner had begun to vex his ears. Presently Gribot's fists went into his eyes, as if to protest again their being made to look on at something so hatefully perplexing, though, indeed, the dusk that was over the Maze now gave curtain enough, and the child became aware suddenly that his seat on the bough was tickling and rubbing him, and that Mariannette was far out and inaccessible. But when he would have turned and clambered back, he was afraid. One cannot climb when one is weeping piteously.

After that, Gribot sat for a long time, and the noise that was like bees humming grew more innumerable, overwhelming the cries of the runner. There were flashing lights too, as of torches, round about the chateau, and thick smoke, sudden hushes,

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and the spirit of flames. Soon the bees' hum changed to the cries of men coming down the avenue tumultuously, and as they drew nearer Gribot could distinguish many of the peasants who lived near Vermont, and among them his father. They carried torches and scythes, and some of them knives tied on to sticks, and they trod on each other, and threw the torch-glare on every side.

Gribot cried out when he saw his father, and the company halted.

"Who is it?" cried the gardener.

"It is me—Gribot," cried a tremulous voice.

His father held up a torch, and called roughly:

"Where are you, your scamp? Come down!"

And Gribot slid down, still blubbing.

Many people, men and women crowded round him, and Gribot only wept the more, receiving such attention. One of the men caught a glimpse of Mariannette up in the tree, and laughed.

"Is it for the kite you are weeping, babe?" he asked.

"No," said Gribot, "and I do not weep neither. But I do not like to hear the man squeak so, like a rabbit."

"What man?"

"M. le Citoyen—in there."

He indicated the Maze with a grubby finger, and was bidden to explain.

"Name of a name," said the gardener, as he pieced together the bits of Gribot's information.

"It is the Citizen Ferrand, without doubt. The

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Marquis also . . . whom we thought to have escaped."

"Where—where?" A woman with torn hair hanging about her face screamed the question, and flourished a knife that she carried. Her face was streaked black with smoke, but it seemed to Gribot that the woman was Mdlle. Henriette.

"Death to the aristocrats!" she shrieked, and she would have gripped Gribot by the sleeve to make him show her where the Marquise was. But he shrank away.

"She was among the lilies," he said, "and those others in the Maze, where M. le Marquis rests beside the stone man who grins. I would not like to sleep there myself. And M. le Citoyen runs round, squeaking—I do not know more."

"I have not heard this noise the child speaks of," objected one.

"But it has left off only this minute," said Gribot. "Hark!"

For a moment silence prevailed, and out of the darkness the sharp, snapping cry came. Then all at once the crowd swayed together in the direction of the Maze, and Gribot could hear Henriette screaming, "Search, search! Death to the aristocrats!"

The others took up the cry, so that the darkness was quick with it. But Gribot ran home by himself, frightened and perplexed. He did not understand what kind of game was being played among the yew-hedges.







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